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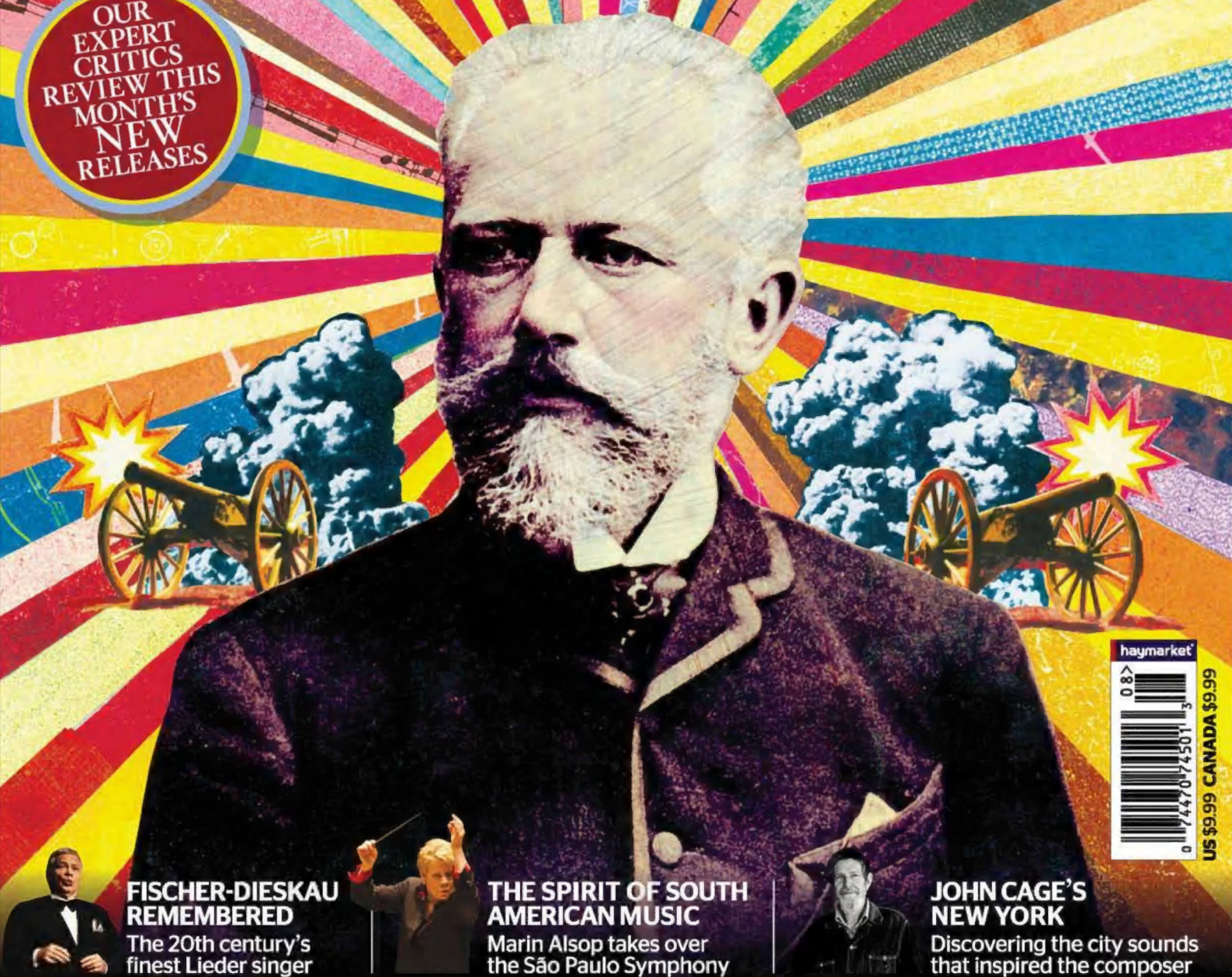
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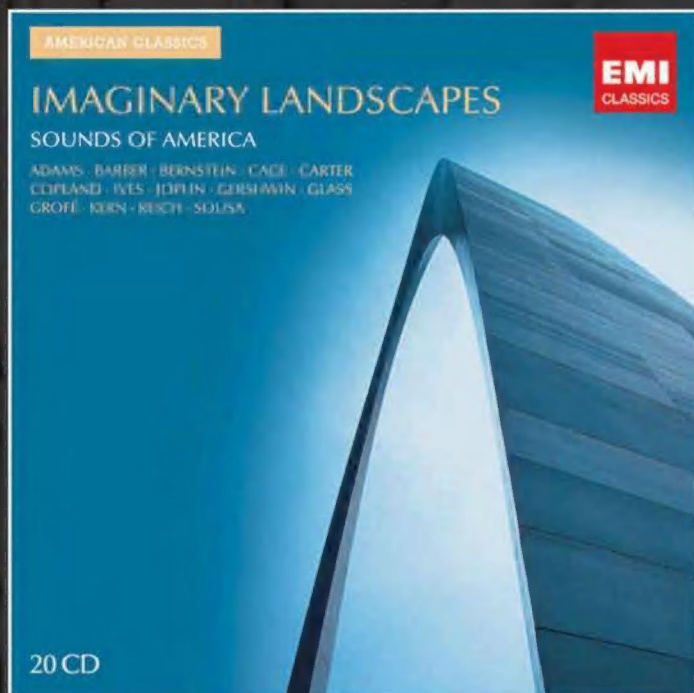
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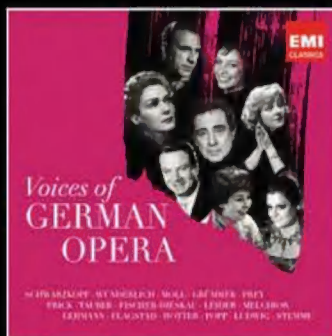
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Sounds of America

Gramophone's guide to the classical scene in the US and Canada



Focus FEED benefit concert – page I » **The Scene** Musical highlights – page IV » **Recording reviews** – page IX



PHOTOGRAPHY: WILL RAGOZZINO/BFANYC.COM

From left to right: Christoph Eschenbach plays piano as Alan Gilbert conducts; David Aaron Carpenter with FEED founder Lauren Bush Lauren and Alan Gilbert

MAKING MUSIC TO RAISE MILLIONS

The Salomé Chamber Orchestra, fronted by David Aaron Carpenter and his two siblings, has contributed to many worthy causes, most recently Lauren Bush Lauren's FEED benefit concert at Lincoln Center, writes **Jed Distler**

On May 30, 2012, the recently formed Salomé Chamber Orchestra shared the stage at Lincoln Center's Alice Tully Hall with luminaries from the pop, classical, business and political worlds. Pop singers John Legend and Natasha Bedingfield, conductors Alan Gilbert and Christoph Eschenbach, not to mention President Bill Clinton and the spirited children's chorus from New York Public School 22 took part. The purpose of this unique concert, partnered by the beauty product company Clarins, was to benefit the FEED Foundation, with the goal of raising funds to provide

one million school meals to children in 62 of the world's poorest countries. Together with the entertainers and speakers, FEED's founder Lauren Bush Lauren (niece of President George W Bush and married to Ralph Lauren's son, David, hence the name) and Clarins's founder Christian Courtin-Clarins addressed a strikingly turned-out audience with apt and insightful comments to the accompaniment of relevantly compelling and seamlessly integrated photos and videos projected on an overhead screen.

The idea that young American classical musicians can be philanthropists may seem far-fetched in a precarious economic climate. Worthy social causes, however, are on top of Salomé's agenda, along with attracting some of the New York City area's most promising young professional musicians. Founded in September 2009, the conductorless ensemble is run by the three Carpenter siblings – violinists Sean Avram and Lauren Sarah and viola player David Aaron – who are Princeton graduates and accomplished instrumentalists in their own right and who also have firm roots and connections in the business world. The elegant ambience and historic artwork that permeates the siblings' Upper West Side townhouse overlooking Central Park evokes images of an era when artists and businessmen hobnobbed in salons, making contacts and exchanging ideas. 'Our informal motto is philanthropy via music,' Sean explained. 'There are not too many classical music organisations with that kind of philosophy, and we saw an opportunity to lend our services to charities not only to raise funds for their programmes, but also to attract their constituents to classical music and attend a concert that they otherwise might not go to.'

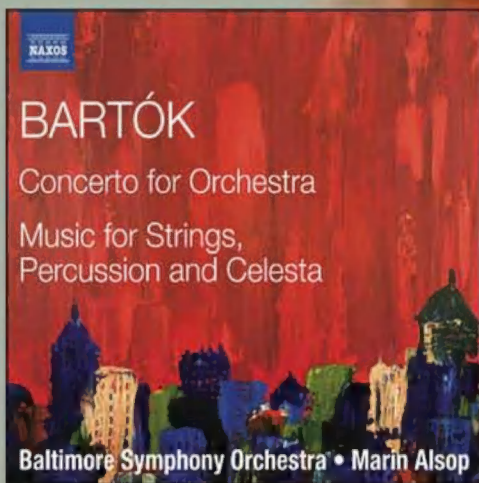
Middle sibling Lauren worked at Google for more than five years as an account manager. Younger brother David, who is Salomé's artistic director, is the recipient of the 2011 Leonard Bernstein Award and the 2010 Avery Fisher Career Grant, with extensive international tours and three releases on the Ondine label to his credit, yet he graduated from

Marin Alsop

BARTÓK

Concerto for Orchestra

Marin Alsop and the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra explore one of Bartók's greatest works, *Concerto for Orchestra*, and delve into the darker moods of his *Music for Strings, Percussion, and Celesta*.



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The concert was led by the Salomé Chamber Orchestra, fronted by siblings Sean, David and Lauren Carpenter (bottom right, with Eschenbach and Bush Lauren)

Princeton with a degree in political science. Sean, Salomé's concertmaster, is a longtime connoisseur of vintage string instruments, who also worked as an analyst at the Fortress Investment Group.

Despite myriad details to sort out and scheduling intricacies to address, the Carpenters couldn't have been more gracious and relaxed the day before the concert as we spoke at leisure over bagels, lox, and perfect espresso in their dining room. 'Although we've done benefits in the past, this one is our first major-scale benefit,' said Lauren. 'We just received our not-for-profit status last year, and thought about what we could do to attract a new kind of audience to classical music, yet also keep to our objective of giving back to the community.'

The May 30 concert was originally conceived as a benefit for the Trevor Project, which deals with teen suicide prevention and services for LGBT teens. 'The original concept for that concert was to celebrate Philip Glass's 75th birthday year by performing his soundtrack to *The Hours* live, while screening the film above us, along with involving its three major actors live,' said Lauren. 'But to do this, we had to involve Glass's team. It turned out that he was on tour around the same time as our Alice Tully Hall date. Hopefully we can do this next year.'

Lauren then approached her friend and Princeton classmate Lauren Bush Lauren, for whom Salomé did a previous, smaller-scale benefit concert at New York's MILK Studios in Chelsea. 'It's necessary to have a strong connection with the group or individual you're partnering with, and we prefer to work with ones like FEED that have very low overheads and are very efficient. For example, the FEED foundation has a team of around five or six people and in the five years they've existed they've brought 69 million meals to children and raised over \$7 million through sales of bags. FEED's costs are very low in relation to the effect of the work that they do.'

With Alice Tully Hall booked, FEED on board, and the Salomé Chamber Orchestra at the ready, the idea for the concert quickly evolved into a classical-based variety show with special guest pop stars and celebrities. As a long-standing partner of FEED, Clarins agreed to underwrite the concert's costs, although all of the participants, including Salomé's members, donated their time and services. And given the event's scale and magnitude, it seemed appropriate for the organisers to call on their closest colleagues for special favours.

Getting two of the world's busiest conductors to perform as instrumentalists was something of a coup, not to mention an honour, according to David Aaron Carpenter. 'Maestro Eschenbach has been my closest mentor since I was 17 when I performed with the Philadelphia

Orchestra,' said David, 'and from then he's really taken me under his wing.' Eschenbach joined an augmented Salomé configuration for the slow movement of Mozart's Piano Concerto No 23, K488, leading from the keyboard with intense focus on both the ensemble and his own sensitively shaded solo contribution.

Although Alan Gilbert was scheduled to appear as a guest violin soloist, he eventually decided that his concert contributions would be more effective behind the podium. In the end, David couldn't have been more pleased to have the New York Philharmonic's music director lead special string arrangements by Oran Eldor for John Legend and Natasha Bedingfield. 'Eldor's arrangements are idiomatic to the material, yet they remain classically oriented because they do not use a rhythm section, which pop listeners are accustomed to,' David explained. Indeed, this conscious aesthetic choice helped build an assiduous bridge into the Vivaldi and Piazzola selections where David's

'Eschenbach led from the keyboard with intense focus on both the ensemble and his own sensitively shaded solo contribution'

assertive, colourful viola solos projected over the footlights without any effort. Nick Cannon was supposed to host the evening, but actress and former Destiny's Child member Michelle Williams stepped in at the last minute. Her energy and enthusiasm felt to me overly effusive and a little forced, as did Natasha Bedingfield's uneven vocalism and microphone technique. The group finale, 'Here Comes the Sun,' also seemed rough-edged in relation to the classical selections' high polish.

Whether or not this kind of variety show is the key for hooking younger and newer audiences into classical music remains an open question. Can such a goal be achieved over the course of a single benefit concert? Or will it take months, even years of cultivation? Certainly patrons who attended primarily for John Legend, Natasha Bedingfield or President Clinton also received world-class performances of Vivaldi and Mozart for their ticket price. However, I noticed empty seats after intermission, as if certain audience members saw what they came to see, and were content to leave it at that. In any event, the evening's success bodes well for the Salomé Chamber Orchestra's stated mission to keep classical music alive for young New Yorkers through a dynamic balance of novelty, tradition and hard work. **G**



THE SCENE

There's much contemporary music on offer this month: in San Diego, at Tanglewood, at Salt Bay, at Cabrillo, at Angel Fire – even at Mostly Mozart, whose schedule features some startling juxtapositions



Music@Menlo's directors David Finckel and Wu Han, who will be performing together in Atherton this year

ATHERTON, CA

Music@Menlo

Resonance (July 20 – August 11)

The San Francisco Bay Area's premier chamber music festival and institute celebrates its 10th-anniversary season. The festival, whose theme is 'resonance' (reflected in its title) promises to explore 'music's relationship with humanity' over the course of eight concert programmes, five artist-curated concerts and a host of other events. August highlights include concerts programmed around key themes. Motivated: Invitation to the Dance explores dance's influence on the classical arts, and includes among other pieces) Bach's *Orchestral Suite No 2, BWV1067*, Bartók's *Romanian Folk Dances* and Copland's *Appalachian Spring*. Inspired: Musical Meditations explores the spiritual components of *The Seven Last Words of Our Saviour on the Cross* by Haydn. Another concert (Violin Celebration) brings the violin into intense focus, charting its history with performances of four diverse sonatas for violin and piano, played by some of the best chamber musicians in the business. Towards the end of the festival, Music@Menlo's artistic

directors David Finckel and Wu Han perform a rich programme of work for cello and piano, including such contrasting pieces as Strauss's youthful Cello Sonata and Messiaen's deeply personal 'Praise to the Eternity of Jesus' from his *Quartet for the End of Time*.

musicatmenlo.org

NEW YORK

Mostly Mozart Festival

Mozart; Schubert; Birdsong

(July 28 – August 25)

This year's festival celebrates the 10th season of music director Louis Langrée, who has tended to bolster the traditional Mozart fare with startling juxtapositions. This year is no exception. On August 10 & 11, Langrée conducts Mozart's *Symphony No 39*, which shares the bill with Bartók's *Third Piano Concerto* (with Jean-Efflam Bavouzet) and Lutosławski's *Musique funèbre*. Likely to push things even further, the Brooklyn-based International Contemporary Ensemble (ICE) return as artists-in-residence, offering some unconventional music in the form of John Cage's *Telephones and Birds* for ensemble and electronically recorded birds.

In fact, birdsong is one of the underlying themes of the festival, and bird-inspired music finds its way on to many of the programmes, including Jonathan Harvey's *Bird Concerto with Pianosong* and Messiaen's *Oiseaux exotiques*. (And remember, Mozart did keep a pet starling.) Schubert's music is also celebrated alongside Mozart, including his *Third*, *Fourth (Tragic)* and *Ninth (Great)* Symphonies, and the *Trout* Quintet is performed by the Emerson String Quartet and rising-star pianist Joyce Yang. Among the big-name performers featured in the festival are acclaimed Austrian pianist Rudolf Buchbinder (making his Mostly Mozart debut with Beethoven's *Third Piano Concerto*), and Joshua Bell, who performs Brahms's *Violin Concerto*.

mostlymozart.org

SANTA CRUZ

Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music

Fearless@50 (July 28 – August 12)

Premieres abound at the Cabrillo Festival. Led by music director and conductor Marin Alsop, the festival's 50th-anniversary season features six world premieres; three West Coast premieres; a special



anniversary commission, *Woman of the Apocalypse*, by Scottish composer James MacMillan; and the premiere of *Hidden World of Girls: Stories for Orchestra*, a multimedia work for full orchestra based on a radio series exploring true stories narrated by women. Other highlights include John Wineglass's specially commissioned work *Someone Else's Child*, based on poetry written by juvenile prison inmates. There's also chamber music performed by the San Francisco-based Del Sol String Quartet, who specialise in the works of living composers with wildly differing perspectives. They'll perform the world premiere of Mason Bates's *Bagatelles for String Quartet*, which characteristically for this composer/DJ features electronica. The festival also honours its own history with works by the late Lou Harrison, one of Cabrillo's founding members, and the celebrated Mexican composer (and former music director at Cabrillo) Carlos Chavéz.

cabrillomusic.org

SANTA FE

Santa Fe Opera

Strauss: *Arabella* (July 28; August 1, 6, 17 & 23)

Susan Graham & Friends (August 4)

As is typical for the Santa Fe Opera, summer offers an alluring mix of the familiar and less well-known gems from the canon. One such is Richard Strauss's *Arabella*, which, like Mozart's *Così fan tutte*, is a serious farce. Written by the composer between 1929 and 1932, it deals (topically perhaps) with the consequences of a bad economy. The beautiful *Arabella* is being pressured by her cash-strapped parents to marry for money not love. While there are some extreme comedic situations featuring rich buffoons, Strauss ravishes the audience with some of his most lyrically tender music. Erin Wall, who sang the four heroines in the 2010 *Tales of Hoffmann* and *Daphne* in 2007, returns to Santa Fe to sing the title-role, with Heidi Stober as her sister Zdenka. Andrew Davis conducts. And for one night only, mezzo Susan Graham hosts an evening of arias, duets and ensembles featuring the Santa Fe Opera Orchestra. Among her guests are Erin Wall (see above) and William Burden.

santafeopera.org

SAN DIEGO

La Jolla Music Society SummerFest

Tan Dun; Kahane; Beethoven

(July 31 – August 24)

This chamber music festival is celebrating its 26th season with an ambitious programme of works. Highlights include Tan Dun's *Water Passion after St Matthew*, a 90-minute work for orchestra, ensemble and chorus led by the composer (August 4). This conceptual piece plays with water as both a sound and a symbol, with musicians making water drip, flow, burble, crash and hiss. Other featured artists include Gabriel Kahane, who presents his erudite songs, alongside his father, conductor and pianist Jeffrey Kahane, playing Schubert piano works and song transcriptions (August 7). Master saxophonist Branford Marsalis shows his versatility by playing chamber works by Hindemith and Busch, before transitioning into a jazz concert with his own ensemble (August 8). There's still plenty of traditional chamber fare on offer, with Schubert as the featured composer. The Tokyo String Quartet, joined by pianist Jeremy Denk, present works by Haydn, Beethoven and Elgar (August 12). For the finale, conductor Kent Nagano leads the SummerFest Chamber Orchestra in a concert that is anchored by a performance of Beethoven's Piano Concerto No 2, performed by the conductor's wife, Mari Kodama.

ljms.org

LENOX

Tanglewood

**Festival of Contemporary Music
(August 9-13)**

The Tanglewood Festival, set in the bucolic Berkshire Hills, celebrates its 75th anniversary this summer, with a typically starry line-up of performers. But beyond the Boston Symphony Orchestra's weekend concerts at the Koussevitzky Music Shed, some of the most stimulating sounds can be heard in the Festival of Contemporary Music at Seiji Ozawa Hall. This year's festival is led by Oliver Knussen, and highlights the works of 20th-century Italian composer Niccolò Castiglioni (who is almost unknown in the United States) and of four rising stars: English composers Luke Bedford and Helen Grime, and Americans Sean Shepherd and Marti Epstein. Performed by the fellows of the Tanglewood Music Center, expect some thrilling programming, including a new TMC-commissioned string quartet from Epstein. Knussen's one-act opera *Higglety Pigglety Pop!* (story and libretto by children's author Maurice Sendak) can be heard in a concert performance featuring live film and animation, and promises to be a great highlight – with Stefan Asbury conducting.

bso.org



Marin Alsop conducts the Cabrillo Festival Orchestra – a chance to hear a wealth of new music in Santa Cruz



Dudamel will be hitting
the Hollywood Bowl

ANNANDALE-ON-HUDSON

Bard Music Festival

Saint-Saëns and His World

(August 10, 11, 12, 17, 18 & 19)

A summer event renowned for its intellectual bent, the Bard Music Festival offers a smart mix of concert programmes and context-providing lectures and panel discussions over two mid-August weekends. This year the focus is a reappraisal of the music of Saint-Saëns, who crossed paths with Berlioz and Stravinsky and many in between. Twelve concerts trace the arc of the composer, beginning the first weekend (August 10-12) with a range of work. Highlights include a selection of the composer's solo and chamber work, including *Danse macabre* and the Piano Quintet, and works by his lesser-known contemporaries. There are also full-scale performances of the monumental *Organ* Symphony and the Fifth and final Piano Concerto, *Egyptian*, with the American Symphony Orchestra conducted by its music director, Leon Botstein. The second weekend (August 17-19) explores the composer's late 19th- to early 20th-century compositions, such as *L'assassinat du Duc de Guise*, a film score from 1908, and two sonatas for oboe and piano and bassoon and piano, which are intriguingly coupled with Debussy and Stravinsky.

fishercenter.bard.edu

HIGHLAND PARK

Ravinia Festival

Kiri Te Kanawa (Aug 12 & 14)

Mozart: The Magic Flute (Aug 16 & 18)

Mozart: Idomeneo (Aug 17 & 19)

This festival seems to have something for everyone, but August is especially good for opera lovers. *The Magic Flute* has a thrilling cast, including the recent Richard Tucker Award-winner Ailyn Pérez as Pamina, and baritone Nathan Gunn as Papageno. With its likewise youthful cast, *Idomeneo* features Susanna Phillips and Tamara Wilson, and Richard Croft in the title-role. James Conlon leads the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. Dame Kiri Te Kanawa demonstrates her vocal range in a recital of works in wildly differing styles by Vivaldi, Liszt, Berlioz, Korngold, Heggie and others. She also gives a masterclass with up-and-coming vocal artists from Ravinia's Steans Music Institute. Some of these students themselves present concerts on August 6 and 13.

ravinia.org

DAMARISCOTTA

Salt Bay Chamberfest

Time Passing (August 14, 17, 18, 19 & 24)

Chamber concerts take place in the intimate setting of a converted cow barn-turned-concert hall perched on the promontory of Great Salt Bay. What better place to ruminate on the passage of time – this year's theme as explored by composers as diverse as Schubert, Lukas Foss, Sebastian Currier, Brahms and Strauss. The season opens with Schubert's songs about youth, time and death (featuring soprano Susan Narucki), Foss's epic work *Time Cycle* and Brahms's late Clarinet Trio with key musicians drawn from top US orchestras. The Brentano Quartet present an intriguing concert entitled *Fragments: Connecting Past and Present*, in which fragmentary compositions by masters such as Bach, Mozart, Schubert and Schoenberg are 'completed' by six living composers – including Bruce Adolphe, Vijay Iyer, Sofia Gubaidulina and John Harbison. There's also a rare chance to hear New York Philharmonic music director Alan Gilbert perform as violinist in a chamber programme featuring one of Strauss's last works, *Metamorphosen*, a concert that also includes Beethoven's Piano Trio, Op 70 No 2. The final concert features the world premiere of a newly commissioned work by composer Roger Zare, and works by Currier and Chausson.

saltbaychamberfest.org

LOS ANGELES

LA Philharmonic

Americas & Americans (August 14-19)

The LA Phil's dynamic maestro Gustavo Dudamel presents a week-long festival at the Hollywood Bowl featuring the music of both North and South America. The idea behind *Americas and Americans* is to find the common threads and musical moments between the hemispheres. For the first classical offering the orchestra plays Latin American tangos and other festive music, and is joined by Dominican singer-songwriter Juan Luis Guerra, who's known for mixing merengue, bolero and other Latin styles in his performances. A second classical programme showcases Venezuelan-Argentine pianist Sergio Tiempo in Ginastera's Piano Concerto No 1, followed by Copland's Symphony No 3. On the last night of



the festival, Plácido Domingo headlines an evening of Latin songs and operatic arias.

hollywoodbowl.com

ANGEL FIRE, TAOS, RATON & LAS VEGAS

Music from Angel Fire

Chamber works; Sticky World Premiere (August 17 – September 2)

World-class chamber music in the beauty and seclusion of Northern New Mexico's spectacular mountain communities of Angel Fire, Taos, Raton and Las Vegas. Beginning on August 17 and continuing for over two weeks, till September 2, international artists perform in 17 concerts and include the pianist Anne-Marie McDermott, flautist Tara Helen O'Connor and the violinists Ida Kavafian, Ani Kavafian and Pamela Frank. Two themes run through the 2012 season: French Music, prompted by the 150th anniversary of Debussy; and Music Inspired by Religion, including the *Rosary Sonatas* for violin and continuo by the 17th-century composer Heinrich Biber, and Haydn's *Seven Last Words of Our Saviour on the Cross*. Another highlight is the world premiere (Angel Fire, August 22) of a newly commissioned piece by composer-in-residence Steven Stucky – a piano quartet comprising several short movements based on sculptures by British artist Andy Goldsworthy, who finds his inspiration in the natural world.

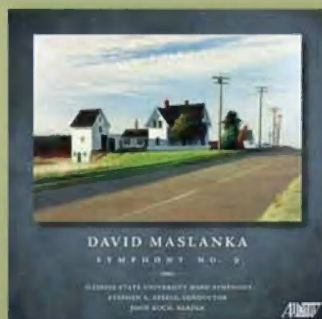
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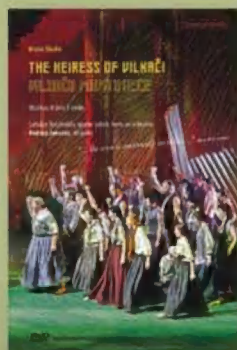
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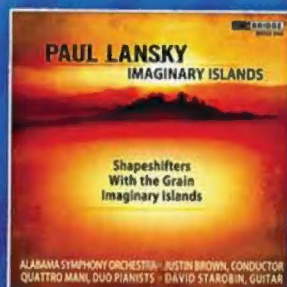
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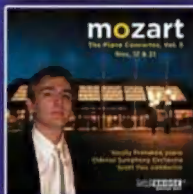
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Beethoven

Leonore Overture No. 3
Symphony No. 7

One of Beethoven's most stirring works was one he considered among his finest: the Symphony No. 7. The Seventh was immensely popular from its first playing, and its powerful second movement underscored seminal moments in the Oscar-winning movie *The King's Speech*.

Leonore No. 3 is the most expansive of the four overtures Beethoven composed for his only opera, *Fidelio*. He chose the shortest of those to introduce his drama but always loved *Leonore* No. 3. Here, he packs the opera's story into fifteen minutes, starting in darkness and breaking through to light.



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Reviews



Donald Rosenberg reviews English polyphony from Seattle:

'As sung by the Byrd Ensemble musicians, every expressive subtlety is placed in luminous and urgent context' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE XIII**



Jed Distler reviews Naxos's Judith Lang Zaimont portrait:

'Atzinger imbues her works with solid virtuosity, a strong sense of long lines and a keen ear for variety' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE XIII**

JS Bach

Sonatas – No 1, BWV1014; No 3, BWV1016; BWV1020; BWV1030; BWV1031 – Siciliana

Lara St John *vn* Marie-Pierre Langlamet *hp*

Ancalagon © ANC139 (65' • DDD)



Sonatas from Canadian fiddler and the Berlin Phil's harpist

Remember Lara St John's vital, assured, red-blooded and technically spectacular solo Bach CD debut of 1996? Her recent complete set of the Sonatas and Partitas revealed the violinist to have embraced the virtues and the mannerisms characterising historically informed performance practices. The same holds true with the present release. The Canadian violinist's full-bodied, communicative tone has become even more wiry, threadbare and emasculated, with less focused intonation to the long, sustained notes. She often introduces little *diminuendos* in the middle of phrases that run counter to their melodic direction, in the manner of someone who makes eye contact with you, begins to ask a question, and then suddenly looks away from you mid-speech.

You hear this, for example, at the start of the third movement *Andante* of the B minor Sonata, BWV1014, and in the *Andante* of the Flute Sonata transcription, BWV1030, where the short phrase-groupings emerge like separate, disassociated entities. A harp's sustaining overhang may not guarantee a harpsichord continuo's rhythmic solidity, yet Marie-Pierre Langlamet's sensitive and steady execution of the keyboard parts provides a gentle anchoring presence, despite an overly resonant recording that turns some of the right-hand counterlines to mush. There's far more intrinsic shape and musical sense informing Viktoria Mullova's similarly HIP-influenced Bach sonatas, not to mention a soupçon of (ssh...don't tell Roger Norrington)...vibrato!

Jed Distler

BWV1014, BWV1016 – selected comparison:

Mullova (9/07) (ONYX) ONYX4020

Giannini

Piano Quintet³. Piano Trio⁴

^aJoana Genova, ^{ab}Stefan Milenkovich *vn* ^{as}Ariel

Rudlakov *va* ^{ab}Ani Aznavoorian *vc* ^{ab}Adam Nelman *pf*

MSR Classics © MS1394 (61' • DDD)



Bon vivant Giannini revived in New York

Aside from two Naxos discs, Vittorio Giannini (1903–66) has languished recently at the wayside of American music. He enjoyed a long and distinguished career as both a composer and educator (among his students was John Corigliano). He is routinely either praised or pilloried for a Romantic vocabulary that was rooted in the 19th century. He deserves better.

The more ambitious Piano Quintet is notable for the morose viola solo that opens the second movement and the radiant harmonic flowerings that follow. The movement shows how well Giannini wrote for the piano when nestled within lush strings; the blending and offsetting of timbres – crystalline at times but always with real warmth – is just about perfect. The outer movements have their own beauties; where the first is self-conscious, however, the third gives way entirely to intoxication, beginning with echoes of Brahms's *Hungarian Dances*.

The Piano Trio is a delight from beginning to end; upward lyrical surges define the outer movements, while the *Andante triste* middle movement is suffused with loneliness, sadness and consolation in a most lovely way. The sound, recorded in the fabled Troy Savings Bank Music Hall in Troy is magical. In her passionate booklet-notes, Giannini's niece wields terms like 'modernism', a fraternity her uncle was not a member of, like aesthetic sabres. According to her priceless comment, that 'he loved life, music, fast cars and cigars', the photograph of a sleek 1937 Alfa Romeo that adorns the cover is an apt visual equivalent to Giannini's music. It almost makes up for the complete lack of biographical information about the music on the disc. **Laurence Vittes**

Hovhaness

Cantate Domino (Psalm 98), Op 385. Immortality, Op 134. Unto thee, O God, Op 87 No 2. Ave Maria, Op 100 No 1a. Simple Mass, Op 282. From the End of the Earth, Op 187. Three Motets, Op 259. Hear my prayer, O Lord (Psalm 143), Op 149. I will rejoice in the Lord, Op 42. Why hast thou cast us off, Op 87 No 1. The God of Glory thundereth, Op 140. O Lord God of Hosts, Op 27

Gloria Dei Cantores / Elizabeth C Patterson

Gloria Dei Cantores © GDCD052 (76' • DDD)



Massachusetts choir move from Howells to Hovhaness

So prevalent is the spiritual undercurrent in Alan Hovhaness's prolific orchestral output that one would expect a certain symphonic heft in the works he wrote expressly for religious use. Alas, that is rarely the case in these pieces, more than half of which are available on record here for the first time.

Not that these works are devoid of musical interest. Far from it. Hovhaness's *Ave Maria* (1955) frames a women's chorus with the subtle timbres of harp, oboes and horns. His *Simple Mass* (1975) balances straightforward tonality for the soloists with more modal writing for the chorus and organ. His Three Motets sound rather like Palestrina returning (and retuning) from an Eastern European pilgrimage. Tying these works together is Hovhaness's characteristic clarity and directness. What is missing, though, is the surprise that often belies the music's simplicity, or the sense of the composer creating a mystical world unto itself. Rather, in the superb hands and voices of Gloria Dei Cantores, Hovhaness clearly aligns himself with a higher authority.

Unlike his symphonic works, which often tweak traditional structures (when not avoiding them altogether), Hovhaness's choral works fall firmly in line with liturgical tradition, calling comparably little attention to themselves as art. Also, for pieces gathered over a 40-year span, from the 1940s through the '80s, his choral output retains a surprisingly level of continuity. Hovhaness the symphonist may have changed

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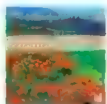
Luminous and urgent: polyphony from the Seattle-based Byrd Ensemble

his musical values conspicuously over the years but his seeming spiritual values remained remarkably consistent. **Ken Smith**

MR Lang

'New Love Must Rise - Selected Songs, Vol 2'
On an April apple bough. Before my lady's window,
Op 19 No 4. In the Greenwood, Op 19 No 2. In a
garden. The Bird, Op 40 No 3. Nameless Pain.
Northward, Op 37 No 6. My Garden, Op 28 No 3.
I knew the flowers had dreamed of you. Song in the
Songless, Op 38 No 4. In the twilight. An Even
Psalm, Op 46 No 1. The Harbor of Dreams, Op 7
No 3. In the night, Op 39 No 3. Nonsense Rhymes
and Pictures - Op 42; Op 43. To-Morrow, Op 39 No 7.
Lydia, Op 32 No 2. A Thought, Op 37 No 1. Lied der
Nebenbuhlerin. Lament, Op 6 No 3. An Irish
Mother's Lullaby, Op 34. Night, Op 7 No 1

Donald George *ten* **Lucy Mauro** *pf*
Delos © DE3410 (59' • DDD)



New York vocal professor continues his Lang revival

Margaret Ruthven Lang may superficially be one of those Franz Schubert stories, an obscure/neglected/forgotten composer writing songs for a close circle of friends (she wrote more than 200 before retiring as a composer in 1919). And, while Lang was no Schubert, she created an attractive, quiet intimacy with her Boston Brahmin audience, inspired by a Neverland of poetry. In fact, Lang at one time

occupied a prominent place among American composers: Arthur Nikisch and the Boston Symphony Orchestra premiered her *Dramatic Overture*, Op 12, in 1893. Her 'Irish Love Song', Op 22 (which Donald George and Lucy Mauro included on Vol 1), was recorded by both Ernestine Schumann-Heink and Alma Gluck.

Each of the songs is carefully considered and wrought in gracefully sunlit shades of romantic twilight. In the single songs arranged as sets named 'The Garden', 'The Twilight' and 'Tomorrow and a Lullaby', Donald George's sweet tenor, partnered sympathetically by Lucy Mauro, captures the modest charm and lyrical flavour of Lang's music. In the six *Nonsense Rhymes and Pictures*, set to limericks by Edward Lear - who was the Edward Gorey of his time, as George and Mauro subtly let on with little winks and grins - Lang raises the silly rhymes to a surprisingly affecting level, as in 'There was a young lady in white'.

Lindsay Koob's delicately written booklet-notes indict a time and society in which women's rights had not been fully established, while providing an excellent guide to the songs. The recording, made at the University of West Virginia's Bloch Hall, is rich and fine.

Laurence Vittes

McCormick Percussion Group

D Adams *Camouflage* **Liptak** *Concerto for Viola and Percussion* **Saunders Smith** *Nightshade*

Sekhon Lou *d* **Timpson** *Concerto for Zheng and Percussion Orchestra, 'DongXiDongXi'*

McCormick Percussion Group / Robert McCormick
with *c* **Carolyn Stuart** *vn* *b* **John Graham** *va* *d* **Scott Kluksdahl** *vc* *b* **Dee Moses** *db* *b* **Haiqiong Deng** *zheng*
Ravello © RR7820 (59' • DDD)



McCormick trace the true line of American music

It's one thing to talk about the legacy of American music. It's quite another to present it as a received tradition, where younger composers clearly draw from their elders. If these diverse pieces offer any overriding theme, it's that John Cage, Harry Partch and Lou Harrison - and before them Charles Ives, Henry Cowell and Carl Ruggles - were hardly solitary mavericks but rather points in a parallel sound world where European musical traditions were merely one influence among many.

Whether you start with the microtonal leanings of Baljinder Sekhon's *Lou* (which opens the collection) or go straight to David Liptak's *Concerto for Viola and Percussion*, where evocative percussion timbres keep viola player John Graham's lyrical playing in constant focus, the musical values here are a world away from Europe. So too in Michael Sidney Timpson's *DongXiDongXi*, a concerto for zheng and percussion orchestra, the Chinese zither finds itself



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rubbing against rhythms it would never find in its native country.

Other composers – most notably Lou Harrison – have mined the possibilities of pitting violin-playing against percussion but the McCormick Percussion Group has pushed that idea to its logical conclusion. By juxtaposing the almost vocal quality of bowed strings with the sharp attacks and quick decay of percussion, each of the composers here manages to keep the solo instrument in its best possible light. Even the double bass – an instrument whose lower register tends to get swallowed up in more traditional settings – makes it through the percussion trio of Daniel Adams's *Camouflage* without ever leaving centre stage.

Ken Smith

'Our Lady'

'Music from the Peterhouse Partbooks'

Ludford *Salve regina* Merbecke *Ave Dei patris filia*

Pasche *Magnificat* Tallis *Ave rosa sine spinis*

Byrd Ensemble

Scribe © SRCD1 (56' • DDD)



Seattle choir dusts down 16th-century partbooks

The Seattle-based Byrd Ensemble specialises in Renaissance polyphony, as is amply documented on their mesmerising new disc, 'Our Lady'. The repertory of English Latin church music is drawn from the Peterhouse Partbooks, which were copied in the mid-16th century and reside at Peterhouse, the oldest college at the University of Cambridge. Many parts in the collection have gone missing over the centuries but they've been reconstructed by musicologist Nick Sandon, who details the challenges in the booklet-notes.

Only one of the composers performed here – Thomas Tallis – is likely to ring most modern bells but he is in good company, with three other fine representatives of the art of vocal polyphony: William Pasche, John Merbecke and Nicholas Ludford. Still, it's no surprise that Tallis's antiphon *Ave rosa sine spinis* is the most illuminating of the disc's offerings, with myriad contrasts of vocal colour and harmonic language to grasp the ear. As sung by the Byrd musicians, every expressive subtlety is placed in luminous and urgent context.

Like the Tallis, the pieces by his colleagues require utmost precision of pitch, seamless unfolding of lines and clarity of texture for the music to work its wonders. The dozen or so members of the Byrd Ensemble, including artistic director Markdavin Obenza, are more than equal to the task. The sopranos are especially pure and radiant, and inner voices emerge or blend with magisterial refinement. Given the beauty of what the Byrd conveys

through microphones, the ensemble must sound almost unworldly when performing in an ecclesiastical acoustic.

Donald Rosenberg

Yedidia

World Dance. Farewell, Nathaniel. Poème.

Nocturne. Concertino^a. Impromptu

Alexander Fiterstein *cl* Ronn Yedidia *pf*

with ^aArnaud Sussmann *vn* ^aMelissa Reardon *va*

^aNicholas Canellakis *vc*

Naxos American Classics © 8 559699 (61' • DDD)



Yedidia the pianist in recordings of his own chamber works

The clarinetist Alexander Fiterstein appears to be capable of anything a composer could possibly ask. His sound can be warm or penetrating, he travels the instrument's range with nimble assurance and he has an exceptional command of dynamic extremes, especially when the clarinet performs a disappearing act.

Fiterstein puts his multifaceted artistry to splendid use in this programme of music by Israeli-born composer Ronn Yedidia, also the recording's articulate and expressive pianist. The repertory employs clarinet, piano and strings in invigorating and poignant conversations, many influenced by ethnic sources from Israel and elsewhere.

The modal flavours in Yedidia's music are partly what make it so instantly appealing. Harmonies travel surprisingly from major to minor (and back again), and phrases head on vibrant rhythmic tangents with feet rooted in dance forms.

The disc's opening selection, *World Dance*, is a whirlwind example of Yedidia's ability to embrace many cultures and set them leaping. Clarinet and piano share honours here and in the other two affecting pieces in the collection, the Chopin-influenced *Impromptu* and the pensive *Nocturne*.

Two other pieces are scored for the same instruments. Yedidia pays heartfelt tribute to a late colleague in *Farewell, Nathaniel*, something of a song without words, and ventures into sweeping and haunting territory in *Poème*.

The clarinet teams with piano and string trio in *Concertino*, a work of romantic and brooding persuasion. The strings take a break midway to let the clarinet set off on a moody cadenza, which Fiterstein plays to the dramatic hilt.

Donald Rosenberg

Zaimont

Piano Sonata. Nocturne: La fin de siècle.

A Calendar Set – 12 Virtuoso Preludes

Christopher Atzinger *pf*

Naxos American Classics © 8 559665 (66' • DDD)



St Olaf piano professor with Zaimont portrait

That Judith Lang Zaimont's piano music has found numerous champions attests to the composer's ability to write well-crafted, wide-ranging, accessible and passionate works that are both challenging and audience-friendly, as well as idiomatic enough to sound harder than they actually are to execute. Perhaps the latter characteristic is due to Zaimont's own terrific pianism. In any case, her 30-minute, three-movement Piano Sonata (1999–2000) abounds with substance and authority. The opening 'Ricerca' movement features lithe, quicksilver contrapuntal writing and stern, granitic blocks of chords, while the central 'Canto' goes back and forth between rhapsodic flurries and expansive, tuneful melodies that wouldn't be out of place in the Leonard Bernstein songbook. The finale, 'Impronta digitale', is a relentless yet texturally varied toccata, featuring long single lines that dart up and down the keyboard. It was featured as a contemporary music requirement for candidates in the 2001 International Van Cliburn Competition.

If the Sonata evokes French and American influences, the 12 virtuoso preludes making up *A Calendar Set* often seem to bring the Russian Romantics into the 20th century's last decades: note the Rachmaninov-like layout of the full-throated chords and asymmetrical phrases in 'July', or that composer's signature swirling passagework in 'September'. Similarly, the 1979 *Nocturne: La fin de siècle* contrasts American-sounding wide interval leaps in the lyrical sections with Scriabin-esque agitation in the central climax. These gestures all are jumping-off points from which Zaimont's own ideas evolve and flourish.

Zaimont has a sympathetic interpreter in Christopher Atzinger, who imbues her works with solid virtuosity, a strong sense of long lines and a keen ear for textural variety. My only criticism concerns his relatively terse, impatient shaping of the *Nocturne's* opening pages, which would benefit from greater breadth and repose. Although the sound is a tad drab, one still infers the sweep and inevitable drive that make me prefer Atzinger's way with the aforementioned 'Impronta digitale' over Joanne Polk's slower, more intimately scaled rendition or Olga Kern's steel-edged, 'knock 'em dead' approach. Incidentally, Atzinger's excellent, informative booklet annotations mention the pianist/scholar Elizabeth Moak, whose recent two-disc Zaimont collection on the MSR label was released not long before the present disc and has yet to cross my reviewer's desk.

Jed Distler

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THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS



For JAMES JOLLY, his first visit to South America to interview Marin Alsop for this month's São Paulo feature was a thrilling experience: 'I met the many people determined to make the Alsop/São Paulo partnership reach new heights,' he says. 'With such a fine concert hall to work in, she's guaranteed an exciting new Brazilian chapter in her career.'



RICHARD FAIRMAN was honoured to write this month's tribute to the late, great Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau. 'He was one of the gods of music,' he says. 'When I went to University I took one set of records with me – his recordings of the three Schubert song-cycles with Gerald Moore on DG. I was completely seduced by the beauty of his voice.'



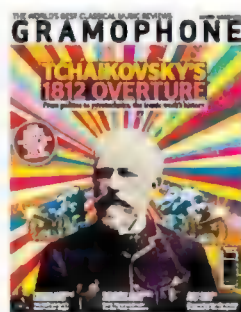
Going to New York to write about composer John Cage in his anniversary year made perfect sense to PHILIP CLARK: 'Music was knitted into the sound of Cage's environment, so what better way to understand his thinking than by standing outside his apartment?' And an unlikely contributor to the piece proved to be Philip's cat Willow...

G FOR THE FULL LIST OF GRAMOPHONE REVIEWERS TURN TO PAGE 41

GRAMOPHONE

Founded in 1923 by Sir Compton Mackenzie and Christopher Stone as 'an organ of candid opinion for the numerous possessors of gramophones'

The 1812 Overture and its enduring appeal



Bombastic, grandiose, excessive...fun, thrilling and extraordinarily popular. Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture* justifies all these terms and, in doing so, has earned its place as one of the most performed and best-known works in the classical cannon. Sorry, canon. Use of heavy armaments are another part of the work's appeal, as well as one of its more formidable challenges. As Geoffrey Norris dryly notes in his exploration of the work's origins, and its

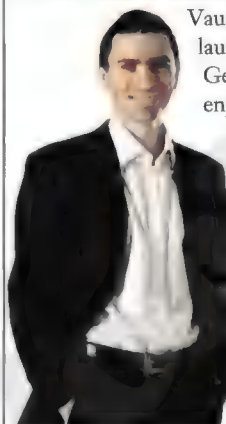
subsequent performance and recorded history, 'early recordings of the *1812* found that the 16 cannon shots near the end presented an acoustical and logistical snag'. Though composed in 1880, the 200th anniversary of its title date seems as good an excuse as any to devote our cover to it. And as those shots sound and bells ring out across an outside spectacular classical event sometime this summer (if, at least in Britain, the weather ever allows), fireworks soaring skywards, it's

'As Geoffrey Norris notes, "early recordings of the *1812* found that the 16 cannon shots near the end presented an acoustical and logistical snag"'

clear that its appeal is as great as ever, more than justifying learning about how different societies and musicians have responded to and embraced this most memorable of works.

It's certainly one of those works that engages audiences less familiar with classical music, an aim which is always to be applauded, for who knows where that may lead? Followers of our news pages will have noticed an ever-increasing trend in initiatives aimed at 'de-formalising' the concert experience, including Limelight in London's basement-bar 100 Club, DG's Yellow Lounge, late nights at Wigmore Hall, or the OAE's Night Shift. Post-show DJs seem obligatory at many such events. I hope it all attracts people to hear high-quality classical music who might not otherwise have considered it. But a visit to an exhibition at London's Foundling Museum about

Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens reminded me that such laudable initiatives have old roots. There, in Georgian London, 100,000 visitors a year could enjoy back-to-back Handel in a setting far removed from the formality of the concert hall, free to stand or stroll at will. Perhaps it is to there, south of the Thames, several centuries ago, that we can trace the origins of innovative audience development.



Martin

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August 2012

GRAMOPHONE *Choice*



Informed by our unrivalled panel of critics,
we choose the month's must-hear recordings



JS BACH

Motets, BWV225-30. Ich lasse dich nicht,
du segnest mich denn, BWVAnh 159

**Monteverdi Choir /
John Eliot Gardiner**
SDG SDG716

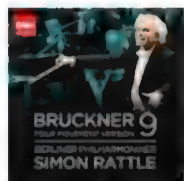
Recording of the Month

'Gardiner challenges orthodoxy in how these a cappella holy grails are fundamentally signposted with persuasive passion and genuine zeal'

► JONATHAN FREEMAN-ATTWOOD'S REVIEW IS ON PAGE 42



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including the Recording of the Month, through the
online Gramophone Player at gramophone.co.uk



BRUCKNER

Symphony No 9
**Berlin Philharmonic
Orchestra /
Sir Simon Rattle**
EMI 952969-2

'I can't think of many recent releases that are more musically important than this. If you love Bruckner's Ninth, you have a duty to hear it.'

► REVIEW ON PAGE 44



DEBUSSY

Orchestral Works
**Royal Scottish
National Orchestra /
Stéphane Denève**
Chandos CHSA5102
'These performances convey both the dynamism and the delicacy of the music with understanding and stimulating freshness.'

► REVIEW ON PAGE 45



VIVALDI

La cetra, Op 9
**Holland Baroque Society /
Rachel Podger** vn
Channel Classics
CCSSA33412
'Podger plays with her customary beauty of tone, purity of tuning and lively variety of articulation, giving a delightfully unforced, spontaneous impression.'

► REVIEW ON PAGE 53



BEETHOVEN

Diabelli Variations
Andreas Staier fp
Harmonia Mundi
HMC90 2091
'Perfectly judged tempi, angular demeanour, characterful contrasts, biting accents and cumulative sweep add up to a performance that abounds with probing details.'

► REVIEW ON PAGE 64



CHOPIN

Piano Works
Janina Fialkowska pf
ATMA Classique ACD2 2666
'When you hear her unleash such a formidable tempest of sound in the *presto* storms of the Second Ballade, you seem to see Delacroix's pained and tortured portrait of the composer.'

► REVIEW ON PAGE 66

**'LATINO'**

Guitar works by Brouwer, Piazzolla, Ponce, Villa-Lobos and others

Miloš Karadaglić *gtr*
DG 479 0063GH

'Karadaglić is a guitarist of superior musical and technical gifts who allows his personality to sing through the music with taste and intelligence.'

► [REVIEW ON PAGE 71](#)

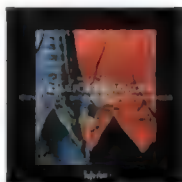
**HANDEL**

Alceste

Early Opera Company / Christian Curnyn
Chandos CHAN0788

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► [REVIEW ON PAGE 77](#)

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Iestyn Davies *countertenor*
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► [REVIEW ON PAGE 81](#)

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► [REVIEW ON PAGE 44](#)

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PRELUDES

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Sydney's Valhalla in ruins

Where
Sydney Opera House

The details
A stunning light
installation by German
design company
URBANSOON gives the
illusion of Australia's pride
and joy collapsing

What an extraordinary sight it was – the iconic Sydney Opera House crumbling to the ground as nonplussed locals scratched their heads in bemusement. All was not as it seemed, thankfully, as the startling collapse was revealed to be part of the city's annual Vivid Sydney Festival, which opened with a series of more than 50 spectacular light displays projected on to some of Sydney's most distinctive buildings. Vivid's executive producer, Ignarius Jones, said the aim was to bring a taste of what happens inside the Opera House to the outside. Perhaps he was thinking of the Immolation scene – Sydney's 'sails' would make for a spectacular Valhalla – but, sadly, they've never put on a *Ring* there. On the other hand, this August Christine Brewer will be performing Brunnhilde's Immolation in this special concert reprises of the house's opening gala from 1973 (see our 'Event of the Month' on page 103).

'Red-letter day for aficionados' as Linn and Universal strike download deal

The recent announcement that downloads – across all genres of music – have finally overtaken physical sales of singles and albums in the US signals a still-rapidly-growing demand for the new technology. Yet the road to mainstream acceptance for high-quality audio downloads has been a long one. While, for many, the digital revolution is fuelled by the convenience of storing 10,000 pop songs in their pockets, for classical enthusiasts, the erosion of audio quality such advances can entail remains a concern.

Back in the '80s the CD was a massive leap forward in terms of hardness and storability, but at 16-bit and 44.1kHz, these supposedly 'indestructible' discs were regarded by some as a step backwards in terms of audio value. The rise of the MP3 took compression to even greater extremes, sacrificing dynamic range to provide a handy, comprehensive library in the palm of the hand. This is, of course, a noble cause – and indeed there are those for whom the MP3 player is now one of life's essentials – but the subtleties of classical music, in particular, can be undermined by the compression process.

It is therefore with some pride that Linn Records has recently announced a partnership with Universal Music to distribute back catalogue and current titles from the company as Studio Master downloads. Linn has been issuing the high-quality digital downloads of its own recordings for the past five years, but Universal is the first classical major in the UK to endorse the format with its own product. At 24-bit or higher and 192kHz, Linn claims the downloads are 'so close to analogue quality that it is virtually impossible for the human ear to perceive any difference'.

This is good news, especially when teamed with Universal's enviable historical catalogue from the likes of Sir Georg Solti, Sir Neville Marriner, Sir Colin Davis, Herbert von Karajan and Lorin Maazel on its Deutsche Grammophon and Decca labels. 'It's a red-letter day for music aficionados – most of whom never

'The old maestros can be compatible with new technologies provided they are treated with understanding'

fell for the MP3's compressed charms and stuck to the trusted CD,' said Universal's director of classical catalogue Barry Holden. 'The agreement with Linn marries legendary recordings to a download format offering demonstration sound, superior even to the CD.'

The first batch of recordings includes Solti's recording of Mahler's Eighth Symphony with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, a 27-year-old Lorin Maazel conducting Stravinsky's *Firebird Suite* and the premiere recording of Britten's *Peter Grimes*, conducted by the composer and featuring tenor Peter Pears – proving that the old maestros can be compatible with new technologies provided they are treated with understanding and care.

The internet's ever-expanding technologies are making waves in the field of music education, too. Just last month,



guitarist Jason Vieaux, in association with video-learning exchange ArtistWorks, launched an online Classical Guitar School, the first of its kind for the instrument. Building on such models as Play with a Pro, which features flautist Emmanuel Pahud as part of its video-on-demand HD movie library, Vieaux's learning programme is an interactive experience: not only has he uploaded a series of video lessons, ranging from basic to advanced techniques, but students can upload videos of their own playing, to which Vieaux will respond. It's an exciting development for budding instrumentalists in remote locations, who are now being given the opportunity to learn from the Cleveland Institute of Music's head of guitar. It's also relatively inexpensive, when one compares the cost of one-to-one tuition – as the Australian National University recently highlighted when advocating video learning as a viable alternative to traditional lessons to compensate for budget constraints.

Budgeting concerns of a different kind are on the minds of the Australian String Quartet, who have scored something of a coup in bringing together the world's only known quartet of instruments by legendary Italian luthier Giovanni Guadagnini. The acquisition was masterminded by Ngeringa Farm Arts Foundation director Ulrike Klein, who has thus far spent \$4m (AUS) buying three of the four instruments for the quartet – a 1784 Turin violin, a 1748 Piacenza violin and a 1783 Turin viola. Klein hopes to raise a further \$2m to buy the 1743 Piacenza cello, which is currently on loan to the ensemble from philanthropist Maria Myers. The instruments will then be loaned permanently to the quartet as a set. 'Some people buy property, some people buy paintings. I invest in rare instruments,' said Klein. 'These instruments will be there for generations to come. It is such a unique story and it connects us in Australia to the old world of fine instrument-making. I am sure it will attract audiences to the concerts.' The Australian String Quartet has undergone a number of personnel changes since their foundation in 1985 as quartet-in-residence at the Elder Conservatorium of Music at the University of Adelaide. The current members are violinists Kristian Winther and Anne Horton, viola player Stephen King and cellist Rachel Johnston. ●

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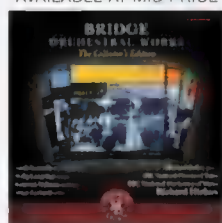
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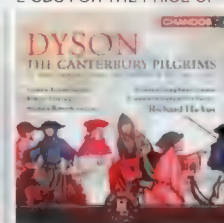


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MUSICIAN'S DIARY

JoAnn Falletta

Ulster Orchestra's new principal conductor on the discovery of rare works by Holst and the joys of being an 'American in Belfast'

Recently, I headed back to Belfast for an extraordinary week. We had planned a very full calendar, and it was a rather overwhelming schedule – but great fun as well. To celebrate the Belfast Festival, the musicians and I had chosen a Pan-American programme – challenging, rhythmic and vibrant works by composers such as Bernstein, Copland, Moncayo, Gershwin and Piazzolla. It was a pleasure for me to introduce the orchestra to some North and South American pieces that were new to them, and I was delighted to see how much they enjoyed these colourful works.

But perhaps the most important part of the week was our first joint recording project on the Naxos label. We had been asked to record five little-known works by Gustav Holst, a great opportunity that was particularly intriguing to me. I have always believed that there is a treasure of neglected pieces (often by well-known composers) that our public deserves to hear. Everyone knows Holst's *The Planets*. But his *Cotswolds* Symphony? This is a piece rarely played in concert halls. It was an opportunity for me to come to know the Ulster Orchestra

'The Holst recording is a document of the beginning of my relationship with this wonderful orchestra'

in a closer way during intense recording sessions, and a chance to discover music that was in their vernacular, not mine. We were tackling music without a significant performance tradition, and, in the case of some of the works, without complete recordings.

The advantage was, of course, that this is music which, while not known, is in the intrinsic vocabulary of the orchestra. Another advantage was the fact that the musicians have had an illustrious heritage of recording under conductors such as Vernon Handley, Bryden Thomson and Yan Pascal Tortelier. The players think quickly, respond impeccably, listen to each other, and perform with élan and a natural style and elegance. A third advantage is the spectacular acoustical environment of the Ulster Hall. A historical landmark and cultural jewel in the heart of Belfast, the beautifully refurbished hall has a sound that is warm, blended and richly resonant. Producer Tim Handley and engineer Andrew Rowland positioned the orchestra on the floor rather than the stage for the recording, creating some aural challenges for the musicians but capturing a truly magnificent sound. The musicians seemed pleasantly surprised by the music; several wondered why these pieces had languished in obscurity.

Discovering this musical language was a privilege for me. I revelled in the sweeping portrait of the Cotswolds countryside in the symphony, a tonal landscape that seemed to delight our recording team, who were happy to share with me their own personal experiences of this beautiful English region. I was intrigued by Holst's interest in other



Outside my new 'home', the beautifully refurbished Ulster Hall



At Belfast's recently opened Titanic Centre



sampling 'the black stuff' in the Crown Bar with my husband Robert

cultures: his *Japanese Suite*, intended as a vehicle for the dancer Michio Ito, subtly explores authentic Japanese melodies; his *Indra* is a brilliantly scored painting of the Hindu god of rain and storm. His *Winter Idyll*, never performed in his lifetime, is a stunning Wagnerian tone-poem, while the *Walt Whitman Suite* is a surprising tribute to one of my own favourite American poets. Holst's music is emotional, deeply felt, nuanced and gorgeously orchestrated, sometimes betraying telling fingerprints of *The Planets* in a more intimate frame.

Ideally, this CD would create interest in these lesser-played works of Holst, and perhaps inspire an open-mindedness to other neglected works. I myself have begun looking for opportunities to programme these works in the US, where they are virtually unknown. The recording is a document of the beginning of my relationship with this wonderful orchestra, and though all of us were exhausted after the final session, we had shared an excellent time together.

Busy as I was, I must admit that I was able to find a little time to explore my new UK 'home'. Highlights included a poignant visit to the Titanic Centre, delicious early morning breakfasts at St George's Market, a quick trip to Belfast Castle, and a late-night celebration at the glorious Crown Bar. Being an 'American in Belfast' is proving to be an adventure filled with joy – and great music. **G**

► Read Gramophone's review of the Ulster Orchestra's Holst CD on page 47



SESSION REPORT Denève conducts Debussy

Works *Debussy: Images, La mer, Prélude à L'après-midi d'un faune, etc*

Artists *Royal Scottish National Orchestra / Stéphane Denève*

Venue *Royal Concert Hall, Glasgow* Engineers *Ralph Couzens, Jonathan Cooper*

Producer *Brian Pidgeon* Dates of sessions *October 10-12, 2011; February 7-9, 2012* Words *Sarah Kirkup*

There was something very special about these RSNO recording sessions at Glasgow's Royal Concert Hall. Not only did they focus solely on the music of Debussy, a composer close to Stéphane Denève's heart, but they marked the conductor's swansong as music director of the orchestra he has transformed over the past seven years. (Indeed, in May this year, Denève gave his farewell concert – wearing a tartan kilt, no less.)

And so the atmosphere was charged with emotion, with a sense that the orchestra – whose standards have catapulted with Denève at the helm – wanted to do their best for the conductor of whom they are so evidently fond. Yes, he talks a lot, and yes, he is meticulous – after every take he would go to the control room to have a listen and, more often than not, want to make changes – but his players and technical team supported him wholeheartedly, not least because, as sound engineer Ralph Couzens later says, 'it's the details that make the difference between an average recording and a spectacular one'.

The concept for this Chandos set is to trace Debussy's evolution as a composer, from a 22-year-old student when he wrote *L'enfant prodigue*, to *Jeux*, his last original orchestral work in 1912. Denève had wanted the pieces to appear on disc in chronological order but in the end this wasn't possible due to timings. His principal aim, though, was to present Debussy as a composer of visually stimulating music. 'I read all of Debussy's letters and I was very happy to see how much he was seeing his music as a very visual thing,' Denève tells me when we later discuss the recording. 'His music is vivid, dramatic and theatrical, and with the RSNO I always try to make them go that extra mile with their imagination. There is good chemistry between the professionalism of the RSNO and myself, an eccentric Frenchman!'

'Debussy's music is vivid, dramatic and theatrical...He himself saw his music as a very visual thing'
– Stéphane Denève

It helps that, bar *L'enfant prodigue* and *Berceuse héroïque*, the orchestra had been playing this repertoire in concert beforehand, their confidence allowing Denève to play around with the music, take risks and create an atmosphere akin to a live concert.

As Denève himself says, he's at his most inspired when he's in front of an audience – 'I like the adrenalin,' he admits – so it's important for him that any recording session feels as charged, as 'live', as possible. And this one did, he says – except, of course, that engineer Couzens, his assistant Jonathan Cooper and producer Brian Pidgeon were in the control room, ready to intervene where necessary.

Pidgeon and Denève have worked together before and, says the producer, 'Denève is great fun to collaborate with. He is very fussy, but this is special music to him, so he wanted it to be the best it can be.' They're not averse to ribbing each other when they're working, whether that be Denève mocking Pidgeon's British accent, or Pidgeon persuading Denève to say 'good moaning' to the orchestra à la Officer Crabtree from *'Allo 'Allo!*. But, most importantly, they have a shared musical understanding. For example, Pidgeon recalls how, after the



1 Microphones span the stage of the Royal Concert Hall, Glasgow
2 Brian Pidgeon and Stéphane Denève in the control room

3 Listening to a playback of *Prélude à L'après-midi d'un faune*
4 Confident: the RSNO had played most of the repertoire in concert

initial take of *La mer*'s first movement, Denève entered the control room and Pidgeon simply said, 'Listen to it.' He handed some headphones to Denève, who, after a few seconds, said, 'It's too slow'. That was Pidgeon's conclusion, too, but one that he had wanted Denève to come to by himself. A repeat take produced more momentum and everyone was pleased with the result.

With *Prélude à L'après-midi d'un faune*, flautist Katherine Bryan and several other woodwind players piled into the control room to listen. Bryan understandably wanted to try the terrifyingly exposed opening several times, and the technical team were happy to oblige.

The only time the orchestra seemed unnerved, Denève later reflects, was in the *Berceuse héroïque*, which they hadn't played before. Written in 1914 for a First World War relief book, it is, he says 'short and looks like nothing – but I believe it's one of the deepest and most meaningful pieces of music. For me, it is the Bruckner Nine of Debussy.'

At the February session, things became trickier with *Jeux*, which required a lot of work but which Denève was ultimately extremely satisfied with. 'It's a revolutionary piece that's rhythmically and harmonically amazing,' he enthuses. With 'Sirènes' in *Nocturnes*, Couzens had to experiment with the positioning of the female choir. 'The voices needed to sound distant but still have clarity,' he explains. In the end, he 'shut out' several of the microphones to create the required effect. 'We could have moved the choir outside but they wouldn't have been able to see the conductor!' he jokes.

Overall, Couzens says that his main challenge was to adapt to Denève's slightly unusual orchestral layout: the second violins were on the conductor's right and the double basses were in the centre, behind the cellos. 'I had to compensate with the mic angles,' he says, 'and it was important to maintain an accurate balance between the first and second violins.' Couzens also had to contend with the rather dry acoustic of the Royal Concert Hall. To achieve a more ambient sound on his recordings, he swears by his handmade Swedish Thuresson microphones. He used four of them in these sessions, and their detail and clarity are, he says, 'unbelievably clear'.

Denève certainly seems thrilled with the results. 'Some people say French music is superficial, but they're wrong,' he says. 'I'm very happy with this CD. But most of all, I'm happy for Debussy.' **G**

► To read Gramophone's review, turn to page 45

PHOTOGRAPHY: RALPH COUZENS



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The Observer (concert review)

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May 28, 1925 – May 18, 2012

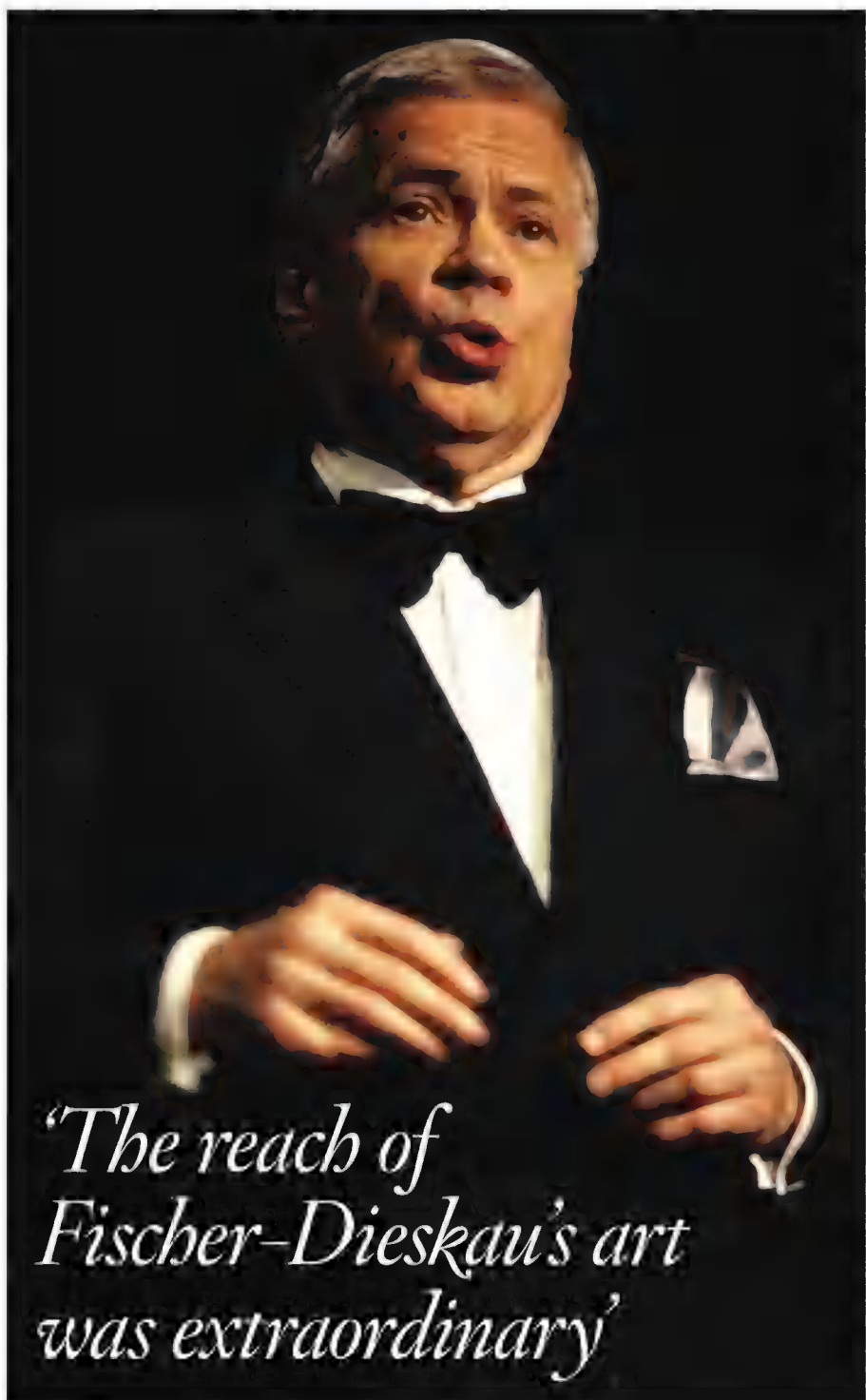
Richard Fairman looks back at the career of the finest Lieder singer of the 20th century, marvelling at the riches of his recorded legacy

The year must have been 1974 or 1975. Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau was making one of his all too infrequent visits to London for a solo recital at the vast Royal Albert Hall – an occasion that seemed only marginally less extraordinary then than it does now. The programme was all Schubert and the hall was packed. If memory serves, the evening started with part of *Schwanengesang* and then went on to some of Schubert's biggest individual songs, including the titanic pair of 'Erlkönig' and 'An Schwager Kronos', separated by the simple, hushed 'Meeresstille'. Who else could have brought off such a towering chasm of contrasts? Who else would even have thought of it?

It is difficult to convey to anybody who was not around at the time what a colossus Fischer-Dieskau was in the musical world. Even among a generation of dedicated song recitalists such as Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, Victoria de Los Angeles and Janet Baker, Fischer-Dieskau could claim a level of ambition and achievement that put him in a class of his own. It is hard to see any of today's Lieder singers wanting to give a recital in the Royal Albert Hall; or, if they did, managing to fill it.

One of the outstanding qualities of his voice was its ability to expand into such a huge space and still seem intimate, lyrical and personal. The range of colours in his instantly recognisable baritone was what first attracted me to him, when I bought his DG recording of *Schwanengesang*, accompanied by Gerald Moore. Not for a millisecond was the voice allowed to become dull and the sound of some of those songs – 'Ständchen' with its silken *legato*, the misty grey of 'Die Stadt', the heart-warming glow of 'Die Taubenpost' – has been with me ever since.

In almost every respect, the reach of Fischer-Dieskau's art was extraordinary, embracing recitals, concerts and opera. My first encounter with him live was in Schumann's *Szenen aus Goethes Faust*, conducted by Boulez, where he was every bit as inspirational as in the Decca recording under Britten. At the Edinburgh Festival soon afterwards there followed an unexpectedly straightforward *Winterreise* and the Count in *Le nozze di*



*'The reach of
Fischer-Dieskau's art
was extraordinary'*

Figaro – impressively sung, if acted in a calculated, rather overemphatic comic style.

As we look back now, the timing of his career seems heaven-sent. Born in 1925, the young Fischer-Dieskau spent most of his war service tending horses on the Russian front and it was there that he learnt of the death of his disabled brother, starved to death by the Nazi regime. When peace came he was perfectly placed to embark on a career untainted by connections with the Nazis (unlike Schwarzkopf, who was to be pursued on the issue in her later years). Speaking a few days after news of Fischer-Dieskau's death, Christa Ludwig recalled the extraordinary impact that he made when she heard him for the first time, a cherub-faced young baritone singing divine Schubert among the ruins of bombed-out Frankfurt. He was, she said, like 'an angel come from heaven'.

As the post-war era gained momentum, the record industry exploded with activity, thanks to technological advances (the advent of the LP) and increases in disposable income, and Fischer-Dieskau took full advantage of the opportunity. From the very start of his career he was tireless in the recording studio, leaving us virtually blanket coverage of his German Lieder, supplemented by occasional forays into the French repertoire and a generous survey of his operatic roles. When new pastures looked thin on the ground, he went back and recorded the key masterpieces again. Is he, as it has been claimed, the most recorded classical musician of all time? It seems likely.

At the heart of this vast output are the multiple recordings of *Winterreise*: the classic HMV and DG recordings accompanied by Gerald Moore, plus those with, among others, Jörg Demus, Daniel Barenboim, Alfred Brendel and Murray Perahia (the last two also on video). Every one of them is packed with carefully studied detail – and no two are the same. 'Sometimes I got a little closer to the essence of the work, but not very often and never completely,' he said, looking back in later life.

In this, too, it seems to me that the timing was fortuitous. Fischer-Dieskau perfected his highly-studied approach to Lieder just as the audience was growing for recorded music in the home, where people could appreciate the detail picked up by a microphone and absorb it over repeated listenings. As his detractors regularly complained, Fischer-Dieskau's singing was not the kind whereby art conceals art.

While he bestrode the recital stages of the world, he ventured less far afield in opera. Having made his debut (aged 23!) as Posa in *Don Carlos* in Berlin in 1948, he built up a large portfolio of operatic roles (the major Mozart roles, Wagner's Wolfram and Hans Sachs, Verdi's Falstaff, Strauss's Barak and Mandryka and the must-hear duo of Berg's Wozzeck and Dr Schön), but his stage appearances were restricted mostly to German-speaking countries. He sang only two roles at the Royal Opera House, London, and never sang at the Met.

More important is his commitment to living composers, for whom he was a major source of inspiration. Through Henze he gave us the central role of the manipulative poet Mittenhofer (*Elegy for Young Lovers*); via Lutosławski the mesmerising *Les espaces du sommeil*; and he created the title-role in Aribert

Reimann's *Lear*, arguably his greatest operatic challenge (all three are on disc). When Britten came to write the *War Requiem*, Fischer-Dieskau was the obvious choice as baritone soloist to represent the German nation and this is perhaps the premiere for which he will be most remembered. In his autobiography, the singer wrote: 'The first performance created an atmosphere of such intensity that by the end I was completely undone; I did not know where to hide my face. Dead friends and past suffering arose in my mind.' His performances of the work after the premiere were few and far between.

The late years saw only a small diminution in activity.

Recordings and song recitals continued unabated, with the singer giving up little ground from his prime, the voice still beautiful, the stance as upright as ever. Marriage to his fourth wife, the soprano Júlia Várady, must have been an additional source of encouragement, yielding partnerships in Bartók's *Duke Bluebeard's Castle* and various duo opera recordings, including some for Orfeo with Fischer-Dieskau as conductor. His final performance was in 1992.

Today's Lieder interpreters favour a much simpler style. But how could it be otherwise? Copying the controversially individual Fischer-Dieskau has never really been an option – I recall a student at college who tried it and ended up as a grotesque caricature – so the lessons this great artist has to teach us are rather the general ones: love of words and music, hard work, dedication to one's art. The path Fischer-Dieskau followed was very much his own, but thanks to his incomparable legacy of recordings, it is one that posterity will always be able to enjoy in his company. **G**

Fischer-Dieskau at Henry Wood Hall in 1998, opposite, and singing *Das Lied von der Erde* at Abbey Road Studios in 1959, below



RECOMMENDED RECORDINGS



Schubert – The Song Cycles
Fischer-Dieskau bar Gerald Moore *pf* DG © ③ 477 7956GB3
Including peerless recordings of *Winterreise*, *Die schöne Müllerin* and *Schwanengesang*, this three-disc set represents amazing value.



Britten – War Requiem
Soloists: LSO / Britten Decca © ② 475 7511DOR2
This is one of the great performances of recording history. Fischer-Dieskau's fellow soloists are tenor Peter Pears and soprano Galina Vishnevskaya.



Mozart – Le nozze di Figaro
Soloists: Deutsche Oper Berlin / Böhm DG © ③ 449 7282GOR3
Böhm's best *Figaro* recording. The orchestra is on fizzing form and the cast led by Prey, Mathis, Janowitz and Fischer-Dieskau is exemplary.



Loewe – Ballads and Lieder
Fischer-Dieskau bar Jörg Demus *pf* DG © ② 449 5162GX2
All the best-known ballads are included here, magnificently sung by a great artist at the height of his powers.



Schumann – Szenen aus Goethes Faust
Soloists: ECO / Britten Decca © ② 425 7052
In this classic recording with Pears, Harwood and Shirley-Quirk, the dramatic moments of blinding, visionary dreams and death are profoundly moving.



Brahms – German Requiem
Soloists: Philharmonia Chorus and Orchestra / Otto Klemperer EMI © 566903-2
The soloists, Schwarzkopf and Fischer-Dieskau, are still unequalled in a reading of juggernaut power.

Musician and the Score

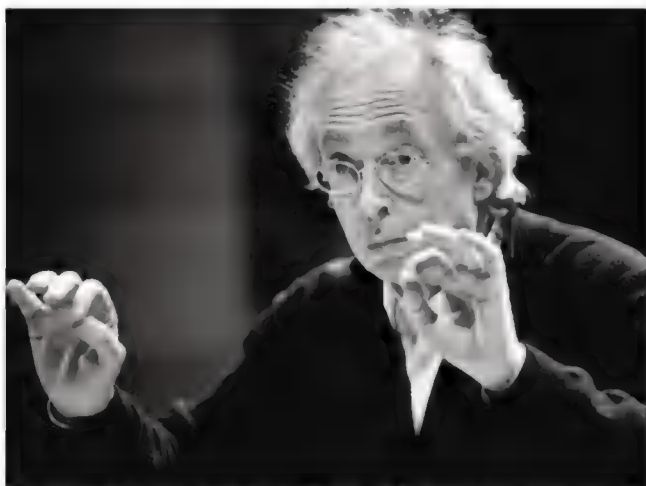
David Vickers talks to conductor *Philippe Herreweghe* about recording Bach's B Minor Mass

Ten minutes in a taxi from Brussels' famous 17th-century Grand-Place brings me to a quiet street of tall terraced houses, where Philippe Herreweghe wants to discuss his new recording of Bach's Mass in B minor. We sit in an upstairs room containing neatly ordered bookcases full of eclectic publications on all kinds of subjects; his wife Ageet's Baroque cello lies positioned carefully nearby, and an open rear door leads out into a compact, beautiful garden. This environment of highly ordered elegance seems in keeping with Herreweghe's cultivated musicianship. His old score of Friedrich Smend's edition of the Mass in B minor (published 1954) bears visible signs of heavy use over the years. This is not the large score from which Herreweghe conducts, but the miniature version he uses at home for personal study; it is full of passages and details marked with highlighter pens, and annotations are pencilled into the margins. In comparison, my paperback copy seems pristine and unused.

Herreweghe's third recording of the Mass in B minor is fractionally faster, smaller-scale and gentler than his previous 1998 version. The opening bars of the *Kyrie* are surprisingly consoling – I joke that this is 'lowercase b minor' rather than grand monumentalism, and Herreweghe agrees: 'It's so tempting to go for the romanticised "Liszt" approach in those opening bars, but now I feel that this should be more like a fresco by Giotto. We spent 40 minutes recording just these four bars to avoid that kind of temptation. I learned so much from Gustav Leonhardt's approach based on verticality, rhythm and dance, but my feeling nowadays is that choosing the character of Bach's music must

'Two bassoons and the bass are effective ways of painting "lowness", whereas the horn is a symbol of God because it is high'

be based on how the singers express what the words mean, and this causes linearity.' Herreweghe enthuses about rhetorical details. 'If an orator wants to keep the attention of his audience, then sometimes he deliberately drops the volume of his voice – and for me the most powerful rhetorical moments happen when you use softness for the dialogues between orchestra and voices.' I suggest that the light airiness of his approach to 'Gloria in excelsis Deo' is distinct from the gutsy blasting trumpets we often hear. 'We know Bach had books about Greek rhetorical thought, and the *Gloria* is full of "anabasis": rising vocal phrases and also string figures that announce "Glory to God" whilst ascending up to heaven. Twenty years ago we were happy if we



Putting the music first: Herreweghe avoids self-indulgence in Bach's B minor Mass

could just get Baroque trumpeters who played the right notes, but now it's possible for us to try subtler things.'

In recent years, Herreweghe has changed his mind about the function of solo voices and the size of choir he prefers to use in Bach's music: 'I was doing a concert a few years ago with my soloists sitting on their chairs at the front doing nothing for most of the time, and I found myself thinking, "This is strange and it can't be right." I agree up to a point that a group of single voices seems absolutely perfect for Bach's early cantatas, but for his bigger-scale Leipzig music I like to have three voices on each choral line, including the soloist and two others.'

Bach's orchestration in 'Quoniam tu solus sanctus' prompts Herreweghe to suggest 'the aim of Bach is to say we mortals down here and stuck in the misery of the Earth are low, so two bassoons and the bass voice are effective ways of painting lowness, whereas the solo horn is a symbol of God because it is high – and also because the hunting horn conveys the privilege of aristocracy.' Herreweghe's most radical change is the pacing of *Agnus Dei*. In 1998 it was sung by Andreas Scholl and lasted six-and-a-half minutes but, in this new recording, Damien Guillon's unforced performance lasts just five minutes. As the good-natured Herreweghe admits, 'I used to conduct it very self-indulgently, but now I think it's more natural.' He concludes that his idealised hope is for listeners 'to hear Bach's music without my personality getting in the way too much.'

■ To read Gramophone's review, turn to page 72



The historical view

Johann Sebastian Bach

Bach's dedication to the Elector of Saxony of a set of parts of the Kyrie and Gloria, July 1733

'I present in deepest devotion this trifling product of that science which I have attained in music, with the most humble request that Your Highness will regard it not according to the imperfection of its composition, but with a most gracious eye.'

Hans Georg Nägeli

Subscription announcement for the first printed edition of the Mass, June 1818

'It contains within its 27 spacious numbers all manners of the art of counterpoint and canon in that degree of perfection always admired in Bach's work. The instrumentation, and even the art of interlude, are advanced to such an extent as to inspire astonishment.'

John Butt

Bach: Mass in B minor (Cambridge University Press, 1991)

'The work is an exhaustive...summation of the composer's musical skills, and of all the styles, idioms and devices available to his age. Bach clearly viewed the Mass genre as the most historically durable form...to reflect a God-given structure and order.'

QUIZ



I worked with Maria Callas on no fewer than five operas at La Scala

Who am I?

Pit your wits against Gramophone

I was an immensely rich young man and among my circle of friends and acquaintances I could count both Giacomo Puccini and Arturo Toscanini.

I was born a Count, the son of a Duke, and early in my life my passion was horses – I bred racehorses for eight years.

Although at one time a Fascist myself, during the 1930s I found the stifling culture of Fascist Italy oppressive and moved to France. When I returned to Italy, I joined the Resistance and, during the Second World War, I even joined the Communist Party and was imprisoned by the Gestapo.

While in Paris, where I was friends with Coco Chanel, I fell in love with a celebrated fashion photographer who became a legend in his own lifetime, and also with a somewhat

older man who was a famous French film director.

My work took me to some of the world's great opera houses, including La Scala, Rome, Vienna and Covent Garden. During my years at La Scala I did no fewer than five operas with Maria Callas. Others with whom I worked include Mirella Freni and Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau.

There is now a museum dedicated to my work on the beautiful island where I once lived.



Coco Chanel was my close friend

HOW TO ENTER

Visit gramophone.co.uk/win – you will need to be registered and logged in to gramophone.co.uk. Entries close at 2pm on Monday September 3, 2012. The prize is a selection of classical CDs. Open to website users aged 18 or over. No cash alternative. Prizes are non-transferable. Only one entry per person. For full terms and conditions, visit gramophone.co.uk

MAY ISSUE WINNER

The answer was **John Wellington Wells**. The first correct answer drawn was submitted by Penelope Wood of Leeds, UK, who wins a selection of CDs.

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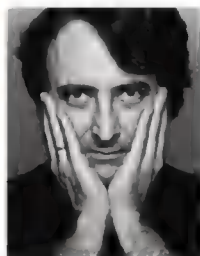


Artist of the Year 2012

Every year, the Gramophone Classical Music Awards celebrate an artist at the height of his or her powers. Here are this year's nominees from which you can select our Artist for 2012

Isabelle Faust (violinist)

Isabelle Faust was our Young Artist back in 1997 and our belief in the violinist has been well justified: she returned two years ago to collect the Chamber Award for her Harmonia Mundi set of Beethoven's violin sonatas. This year she gave us a superlative coupling of the violin concertos by Berg and Beethoven and confirmed what a great player she has developed into.



Jean-Efflam Bavouzet (pianist)

Piano cognoscenti have long known Bavouzet's name but it was his Debussy cycle for Chandos that put his name on a wider map (and won him a couple of *Gramophone Awards*). He has now embarked on two major series: the piano sonatas of Haydn and Beethoven. He's no wunderkind, thank goodness, but a fully formed, mature musician with plenty to offer.

Stéphane Denève (conductor)

Britain's orchestras have long proved major springboards for big careers. Stéphane Denève, in his seven-year tenure at the helm of the RSNO, developed a great rapport with his ensemble and the Scottish audience. An impressive Roussel series for Naxos gave us a glimpse into the dynamics of this partnership and his new Chandos Debussy set impressed us hugely.

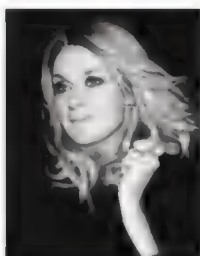


Joseph Calleja (tenor)

Calleja's Rodolfo at Covent Garden this year was a real musical event. His latest recital disc for Decca revealed a superb vocalist with a secure technique and a voice of unique colour. He's clearly an artist of subtlety and style – it's no wonder that he's being sought by the great houses of the world. And his appearance at the Last Night of the Proms will do him no harm!

Magdalena Kožená (mezzo-soprano)

The superb Czech mezzo – aka Lady Rattle – continues to prove what a versatile artist she is: heart-rending in Mahler songs, languid and elegant in French repertoire and a superb Baroque stylist. This year she tackles probably her most ambitious role to date, *Carmen* – and, in the company of her husband and his Berlin orchestra, is sure to set a few sparks flying.

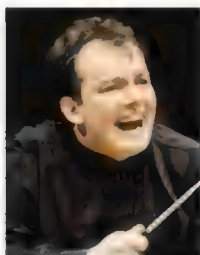


Daniel Barenboim (pianist and conductor)

Barenboim has had many careers: child prodigy, mature pianist, superb conductor and, now, elder statesman, whose influence transcends the world of music. This year has been Beethoven Year for Barenboim and, whether at the keyboard for the sonatas and concertos or on the podium for the symphonies, he always has something of interest to impart.

Andris Nelsons (conductor)

Ever since Rattle turned the international spotlight on Birmingham, his successors have been scrutinised with critical detail. The CBSO's latest musical boss has acquitted himself magnificently, with stupendous discs of Tchaikovsky and Strauss. But Nelsons is much in demand at the highest level, with engagements at Bayreuth, the Met, Covent Garden and with the Berlin Phil.



Philippe Jaroussky (countertenor)

The young French countertenor Philippe Jaroussky draws people into the concert hall who otherwise might never listen to classical music. His high, clear voice of astounding beauty has been put to the service of a wide range of music. A classy addition to any opera cast, Jaroussky is a great stylist whose artistry continues to grow and always impresses.

Andreas Staier (fortepianist)

Andreas Staier has long championed keyboard music on the fortepiano, bringing an intellectual and emotional engagement that is more commonly associated with the modern piano. His sympathies are broad and he's as convincing as a chamber-music partner as he is a concerto soloist or Lied partner. His Beethoven *Diabelli* Variations were one of the year's highlights.



Natalie Dessay (soprano)

Natalie Dessay is one of the great singing actors of our time: a sparkling Zerbinetta, a convincing Lucia or a heartbreaking Violetta. Armed with a near-perfect technique, she has carved out a unique place in the repertoire, demonstrating that coloratura is not just an end in itself but part of an integrated dramatic armoury. She's a fine recitalist, too, as her Debussy disc revealed.

To vote for your favourite artist, simply visit gramophone.co.uk/artist-of-the-year-2012

Voting closes on August 27 – for more information, including video clips and reviews, visit Gramophone's website

NOTES & LETTERS

'The incomparable Heddle Nash' • Chopin pianists • Gapless recording – on the PlayStation

Hall of Fame continued

Were I to compile my own list of 50 musicians who have made a lasting impact on the world of classical music (Hall of Fame, May, page 23), 90 per cent of my choices would likely overlap yours. But I wonder, perhaps, if current popularity might not have had an undue influence on a few of *Gramophone's* selections.

Although I have a certain coolness towards Toscanini's style of conducting these days (a reaction to an excess of adoration in his later years), his example and influence on musicians and the public can't be denied. There are also a few I would not have chosen but whose inclusion is nevertheless justified.

Where I have a problem is in the inclusion of several musicians, undeniably excellent, whose careers are still, relatively speaking, young. Artists such as Toscanini, Klemperer, Rubinstein and Horowitz can be judged by their lifetimes of consistent effort and accomplishment.

I'm somewhat astonished, then, by the omission of Leontyne Price or Marian Anderson, whose careers are no less worthy. Either one of them rightly belongs on the list for vocal excellence alone but their role in breaking racial barriers, so that others could follow, is almost sufficient in itself. Or Lang Lang at age 29, but not Rudolf Serkin?

I suggest you adopt the criteria used by the United States' Baseball Hall of Fame: no player (musician) is eligible until five years after retirement (or death), when passions of the moment have cooled to at least a simmer.

Herb Reeves

Greenville, SC, USA

Gerontius's finest tenor

'The incomparable Heddle Nash!' (June, page 75). How often is that or a similar comment made almost every time a new recording of *The Dream of Gerontius* is made and the tenor found to be wanting? I heard Nash a number of times in the 1940s in Liverpool, singing the part from memory, with Sargent conducting. An unforgettable experience which I renew every time I listen to that first recording made about the same time.

A year before that recording Nash recorded some operatic arias with the Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra

Letter of the Month



'More than a guitarist': David Russell

A great guitar innovator

It's good to see a guitarist on your cover (June), and to see three others mentioned in your editorial. For 30 years I have been associated with the specialist monthly magazine *Guitar* and there were times when I felt the instrument was getting nowhere. When I first heard David Russell play (in 1980, to an audience numbering 12!), I was immediately struck by this new force in the guitar: here was a young man who could actually play *legato* on an instrument taught for so long as a chord-based one. In my opinion, this advance entitles him to a place in the list of guitar innovators, or at least of Great Improvers – because now his teaching

has borne fruit in the shape of any number of good guitarists who can make their instrument sing as David did and does. Miloš Karadaglić is one of them, of course, but he has yet to achieve the full range of types of vibrato, the mid-piece correction of minor tuning discrepancies by varying the distance of the finger from the fret, the immaculate phrasing, etc. I can't think of another guitarist who has done so much to improve guitar technique in terms of pure music and that is why I rate him so highly. As Miloš says so accurately, 'He is more than a guitarist.'

Colin Cooper, via email

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**PRESTO
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conducted again by Sargent, one of which was 'In memory I lie beneath the palms' from Bizet's *Pearl Fishers*. This recording was described by Francis Toye, an eminent music critic, as the finest example of *bel canto* singing that he had ever heard from any singer of the 20th century – and he had heard them all!

Heddle Nash died in 1961. Apart from the above comment, I cannot remember any mention being made of him for a very long time. In his time he was dubbed 'Britain's finest tenor', 'King of English tenors', 'Best-loved lyric tenor'. Listen to any of his recordings and marvel at his enunciation – clear as a bell – and the sheer beauty and perfection of his singing. Perhaps it is now time for his incomparable voice to be heard by a new generation!

Walter F Hurst
Oxton, Wirral, UK

Chopin around

Bryce Morrison's review (May, page 98) of Louis Lortie's Chopin Ballades and Nocturnes (Chandos) is worth a comment.

For the record, I have a 70-year love of Chopin's music and nearly as long an experience of live and recorded Chopin performance. I know the scores in detail. We all know, of course, that Chopin is one of the most accessible of composers but that recreating a convincing 'Chopin sound' is another matter altogether. What is generally not appreciated is while Chopin was a master improviser, he found the act of composition difficult. You can tell by his codas that he is essentially a classical composer, yet he would agonise for ages over grace notes. The ideal Chopin player can see the whole thing but is simultaneously aware of the way the detail is structurally relevant.

Bryce Morrison writes of Lortie's



Rafał Blechacz: a God-given talent

'patrician poise...the fragrance of a born Chopin pianist'. I cannot agree for, although each track starts well enough, it then cloyes into a self-consciousness which diminishes the muscular leanness of the writing. For my ears there are perhaps just two pianists who approach some sort of an ideal. I knew the second I heard, by chance, a few bars of his disc of the Preludes (DG, 12/07) that I had been waiting for a very long time for an artist of Rafał Blechacz's stature. With every disc of this artist you are almost unaware of the piano as such – you are at once in the presence of the music itself.

Another pianist of quite outstanding musicality is Juana Zayas. She has made what is surely a near-perfect performance of the F minor Ballade (on ZMI). Listen to how she handles the extended build-up from bars 169 to 191, surely one of the most beautiful passages of piano-writing ever made. She seems to be the only pianist who actually observes the *dolce* at bars 173–74, to telling effect.

One can always quibble, of course, but in the end it is naturalness that wins the day. So many pianists spoil their Chopin by getting in the way, by trying to make it fit some preconceived idea of what is expressive. Blechacz not only has the intelligence, the muscularity and the integrity for this kind of music. He also has the humility. Here is a 'Chopin sound' for our times. It is to be hoped that DG will nurture this artist; his is a God-given talent.

Cuillin Bantock, via email

Mind the gap!

Thank you for Andrew Everard's essay on gapless music storage (June, page 115). I have to say I'm not up to full speed with digital storage but I can understand what all the fuss is about. His article got me thinking about the pile of jewel cases that I've accumulated over the years and how I need to have them to hand or I never get around to playing the discs in them. I happened to glance under the TV and remembered that Sony's PS3 has the capacity to store digitally. I decided to give it a go. I thought I'd try Beethoven's Sixth; if it wouldn't store gaplessly (is gaplessly a word?) then I'd go no further and continue dusting my shelf of CDs. To my surprise it worked gaplessly! I now have all nine symphonies under one playlist. Now I just choose a playlist and once I'm up and running I can turn the TV off and listen through the hi-fi. I'm in the process of 'importing' all my discs...by the time I've done that the PS4 will be probably be out – ho hum. Thanks again.

John Pedersen
Carmarthenshire, UK

OBITUARIES

A much-loved British baritone, Armenia's leading composer and a fine early-music soprano



Derek Hammond-Stroud: a nuanced actor-singer

DEREK HAMMOND-STROUD

Baritone

Born January 10, 1926

Died May 14, 2012

The English baritone Derek Hammond-Stroud has died; he was 86. A noted interpreter of Gilbert and Sullivan, he also excelled in roles that called for exquisitely nuanced acting such as Faninal (*Der Rosenkavalier*), Alberich (*The Ring*) and Beckmesser (*Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*).

He was born in London and studied at Trinity College of Music and with two of the great Lieder singers, Elena Gerhardt and Gerhard Hüsch. He made his debut in 1955 in a concert performance of Haydn's *Orfeo ed Euridice*, making his stage debut in 1957 as Publio (*La clemenza di Tito*). He joined the Sadler's Wells company, where his roles included Papageno (*Die Zauberflöte*), Dr Bartolo (*Il barbiere di Siviglia*) and Melitone (*Rigoletto*), and started to make a name as a superb actor-singer in G&S.

He made his Covent Garden debut in 1971 as Faninal and the role took him around the world – to the Met, Buenos Aires and Munich. His Alberich – conducted by Reginald Goodall at ENO and enshrined on disc – was seized on by Gramophone's Alan Blyth (4/92) for its 'formidably articulate and power-hungry' nature.

A live 1979 Wigmore Hall recording of Schubert's *Winterreise* with Geoffrey Parsons was released on Exegete Recordings and a Schubert collection on Symposium drew from AB (1/90) the comment that 'the baritone has been at pains to emphasise the importance of clear and meaningful diction; indeed he has regarded it as a *sine qua non* for any reputable singer so it's hardly surprising to find words playing such a vital part on this disc'. James Jolly

ALEXANDER ARUTIUNIAN

Composer

Born September 23, 1920

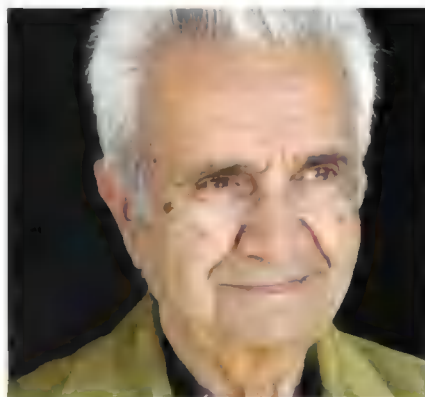
Died March 28, 2012

Alexander Arutiunian has died at the age of 91 in Yerevan, the city of his birth. If Armenia does not immediately summon up a litany of recognisable Western composers, Arutiunian was, for 60 years, a distinctive and internationally recognised figure. Underpinned by the pedagogical traditions of the Soviet era and fuelled by the proud identity of Komitas as the spiritual father of Armenian classical music, Arutiunian's evocative, resourceful and attractive musical language took flight.

From his early cantata, *Motherland*, of 1948 (for which he won the Stalin Prize ahead of Shostakovich) to his final piece in 2011, a flute concerto, Arutiunian explored ways of harnessing intensity of emotion within established classical forms, flavoured variously with regional characteristics. Early works draw on indigenous improvisatory models, while his opera *Sayat-Nova* (1967) celebrates the Armenian troubadour in the time-honoured romantic ideal of vernacular minstrelsy.

If there is a single work which captivated audiences and critics alike it was the Violin Concerto *Armenia-88*, inspired by the Spitak earthquake of that year, which killed 25,000 people at the height of the Soviet 'stagnation era'; it reveals Arutiunian at his most profound, personal and coherent. Yet it is his Trumpet Concerto of 1950 which has established Arutiunian's name as a durable figure. It is arguably the best-known trumpet concerto after the Haydn and the Hummel. Like those two pioneering works, Arutiunian alights readily on the most naturally vocalised and lyrical qualities of the trumpet while also exploiting the instrument's dynamic articulation in thrilling figuration and a dazzling culminating cadenza.

Jonathan Freeman-Attwood



Alexander Arutiunian: Armenia's greatest composer



Judith Nelson: a memorable recorded legacy

JUDITH NELSON

Soprano

Born September 10, 1939

Died May 28, 2012

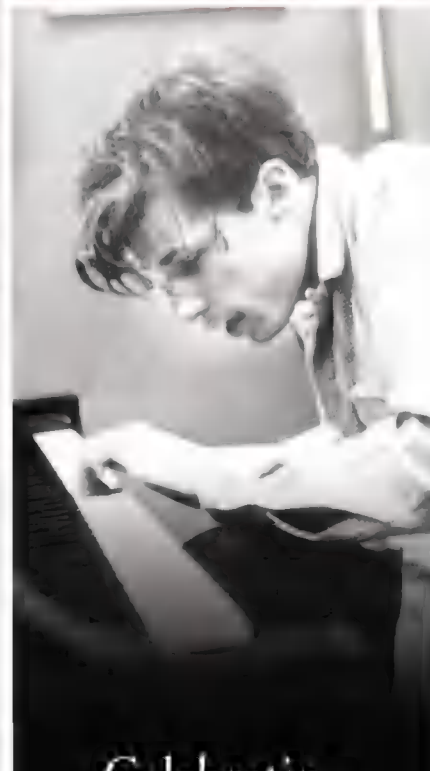
The American soprano Judith Nelson, who has died after a long battle with Alzheimer's disease, was one of the most prominent voices in the early music world at a time when the emergence of period-instrument ensembles was causing a rethink of the kind of vocal sounds and styles required for Baroque music. Her light, clear and agile voice brought the purity of tone and accuracy of line that were very much in demand at the time, yet there was also a discreetly applied vibrato and assiduous attention to diction that lent it grace, radiance and a measure of old-style poise.

Born Judith Manes in Illinois in 1939, she studied in Minnesota before moving with her English-lecturer husband to Berkeley in 1962, where she sang with the UC Berkeley Collegium and the Berkeley Chamber Singers. In the early 1970s a scholarship took her to Europe, where she formed fruitful working relationships with René Jacobs's Concerto Vocale and the Academy of Ancient Music. These, and her work with the Consort of Musicke, also brought her into contact with the young Emma Kirkby, and their sublime duetting in recordings of Handel Italian cantatas, Vivaldi's *Gloria* and Couperin's *Leçons de Ténèbres* is among the most memorable recorded legacies of the time. Back in America, she took part in a landmark recording of the early 1980s, Joshua Rifkin's one-to-a-part Bach B minor Mass (Nonesuch), the first of its kind.

The late 1980s and early '90s saw her concentrate her work in the USA, where she made regular appearances and recordings with Nicholas McGegan and the Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra, and Jeffrey Thomas and the American Bach Soloists, before illness overtook her.

Lindsay Kemp

NEXT MONTH SEPTEMBER 2012



Celebrating Glenn Gould

In the year the legendary pianist would have turned 80, Gramophone speaks to musicians and colleagues about his extraordinary talent

Haydn in Oxford

In The Gramophone Collection, David Threasher explores the best recordings of Symphony No 92

Rattle's legacy

Philip Clark talks to Sir Simon about Bruckner, Bizet and 10 years at the Berlin Philharmonic

GRAMOPHONE
ON SALE AUGUST 3
DON'T MISS IT!

WITH THE
CENTRAL
BAND OF
THE ROYAL
AIR FORCE

WITH
CANNON
AND
MORTAR
EFFECTS

WITH
CHOIRS,
ARTILLERY
AND
BELLS



What else but Tchaikovsky's 1812 Overture could call for such dramatic performance directions? Geoffrey Norris explores how states, societies, performers – not to mention the composer himself – have responded to this iconic, surprisingly controversial, work

As a favoured festival spectacle, the *1812 Overture* has long been ranked among the most adored, and also the most abhorred, works in the entire orchestral repertoire. Tchaikovsky himself was dismissive about the piece, written to commemorate Napoleon's retreat from Moscow that occurred exactly two centuries ago this year. When a female friend owned up to liking it, Tchaikovsky retorted, 'But what do you see in it? The thing was written to order.' Nevertheless, he could scarcely fail to notice, on his travels throughout Russia, Europe and the United States, that the *1812*, rather like Rachmaninov and his C sharp minor Prelude, was a work that audiences particularly hankered after. In America it has become a staple of Independence Day celebrations on July 4. It is still a crowd-puller worldwide. Whether we like it or not, the *1812* has survived for 130 years since its first performance and it is not going to go away.

Tchaikovsky's own reaction to the work could well be interpreted as modest self-deprecation or a manifestation of one of those moods of insecurity in which he so often indulged. When musing on much more substantial works than the *1812* – some of the symphonies, for example – he could quite often veer from wondering whether his talent had deserted him to suggesting that the music might after all have merits. But he didn't have a single good word to say about the *1812*. He expressed blank lack of enthusiasm on receipt of the original commission, which came to him in the summer of 1880 via his publisher, Jurgenson. In the following year, Jurgenson told him, there was to be an Arts and Industry Exhibition in Moscow, and Nikolai Rubinstein had been put in charge of organising the music. Since Tchaikovsky was the most celebrated Russian composer of the day, it was natural that he should be approached to write something. Rubinstein gave him three options. It could be an overture to inaugurate the actual exhibition. It could be an overture to celebrate the silver jubilee of the tsar, Alexander II, who had acceded to the

Russian throne in 1855. Or it could be a cantata to dignify the opening of the gigantic Cathedral of Christ the Redeemer, a project that had been underway for decades but which was finally coming to fruition during the 1880s. This cathedral, incidentally, still towers up into the Moscow skyline – but no thanks to Stalin. He ordered it to be blown up in 1931, and for a long time the site was a popular, if rather down-at-heel, open-air swimming pool, which in the 1990s was filled in again and formed the foundations for the new Cathedral of Christ the Redeemer, reconstructed at phenomenal cost to the old grandiose design.

The original 19th-century cathedral project had been instigated as a commemoration of, and thanksgiving for, the 1812 Russian rout of Napoleon and the hungry, humiliated French army's retreat from Moscow, a factor that seems at least to have put an idea into Tchaikovsky's head. But he responded with open disdain to the notion that he should take it any further. 'It is impossible to tackle without repugnance this sort of music which is destined for the glorification of something that, in essence, delights me not at all,' he wrote to Jurgenson in July 1880. 'Neither in the jubilee of the high-ranking person (who has always been quite antipathetic towards me), nor in the cathedral, which again I don't like at all, is there anything that could stir my imagination.' He continued to grumble about it throughout the year, writing to his patroness Nadezhda von Meck in the autumn, 'There is nothing more antipathetic to me than composing for the sake of some festivities or other. What, for instance, might one write on the occasion of the opening of an exhibition apart from banalities and generally noisy passages?' He added, however, 'I do not have it in my heart to refuse such a request,' reporting later that he had 'diligently set about' composing. He completed the *1812* in only a week.

Tchaikovsky in 1880, the year he completed the *1812* commission in a single week



'I wrote it without any warm and loving feelings, and so it will probably be lacking in artistic merit,' he told Mme von Meck in October 1880, although 18 months later he showed signs that a bit of characteristic equivocation was setting in. 'I'm undecided', he wrote to Jurgenson, 'as to whether my overture is good or bad, but it is probably (without any false modesty) the latter.'

Thereafter Tchaikovsky scarcely mentions the *1812* at all, not even in respect of its first performance, given under Ippolit Altani on August 8/20, 1882, at the Arts and Industry Exhibition, which had been postponed by a year. In the interim, Tchaikovsky had cheekily asked the conductor Eduard Nápravník to perform it in St Petersburg, but Nápravník was more alert to protocol and replied that the exhibition that had commissioned the overture ought to have the opportunity to premiere it as well. Both in Moscow and in St Petersburg, where the *1812* was first eventually performed in 1883 under Anton Rubinstein, it enjoyed instant success. As early as 1916 it was recorded on 78s by the Royal Albert Hall Orchestra under Landon Ronald, and the catalogue has long been generously stocked with versions of it.

Not that the recording history of the *1812* has been entirely straightforward. The demands of Tchaikovsky's orchestration have been a subject for discussion and divergence of approach, particularly in relation to the synchronisation (or not) of the cannon shots, the availability of the right sort of bells and the feasibility of deploying the optional military band. In addition, and notably in one special instance in 20th-century Soviet Russia, Tchaikovsky's thematic material created its own problems. In compiling his musical picture of the Battle of Borodino and of Russia's triumph over the French invaders, he drew

THE 1812 – LIVE

With or without cannons, the *1812* is always memorable – here are a list of opportunities to hear it this year

July 7 – August 18 Battle Proms

The Battle Proms are held in the grounds of six stately homes: Burghley House, Blenheim Palace, Hatfield House, Highclere Castle, Althorp Park and Ragley Hall. A mounted cavalry invite you to discover the chivalry of the Napoleonic era, and the gunners of the English Field Artillery Company herald the commencement of the evening's musical programme. The concert, performed by the New English Concert Orchestra, climaxes with the *1812*, complete with cannons. battleproms.com

**July 25
Welsh Proms
St David's Hall, Cardiff**
Concluding with the *1812*, this 'Tchaikovsky Prom' is performed by the RPO under Owain Arwel Hughes. stdavidshallcardiff.co.uk

**July 27
Olympic Fanfare
Hereford Cathedral**
Part of this year's Three Choirs Festival, the concert

begins at 6pm so that visitors can watch the opening ceremony for the Olympic Games. The programme, performed by the Philharmonia Orchestra under Geraint Bowen, begins with the *1812* and concludes with Berioz's *Te Deum*. 3choirs.org

**September 7
Tchaikovsky Spectacular
Hollywood Bowl, California**
Performed by the LA Philharmonic under Bramwell Tovey, this all-Tchaikovsky programme includes the *1812* complete with cannons and pyrotechnics – described by the organisers as a 'glorious Hollywood Bowl tradition'. hollywoodbowl.com

**November 9
The New York Pops
Carnegie Hall, New York**
Alongside the premiere of a new fanfare composed by tonight's conductor Steven Reineke is a host of favourite symphonic repertoire including Ravel's *Boléro* and, of course, Tchaikovsky's *1812*. carnegiehall.org

*'I'M UNDECIDED AS TO WHETHER
MY OVERTURE IS GOOD OR BAD,
BUT IT IS PROBABLY THE LATTER'*

– TCHAIKOVSKY



Dorati's memorable recording employed
■ loud 18th-century bronze cannon

on a variety of themes that his 1880s audiences would have recognised as French or Russian (plus a melody he borrowed from his own first opera, *The Voyevoda*), manipulating them cunningly in a structure that melds aspects of sonata form with free fantasy, and with a famously over-the-top coda. The overture starts with the lower strings intoning the Russian Orthodox chant 'Spasi, Gospodi, lyudi Tvoya' ('God, Preserve Thy People'). Later on, Tchaikovsky cites a sprightly Russian folk tune, 'U vorot' ('By the Gates'). These are clear indicators of Russianness, uniting the country's timeless religious traditions with the joys of the simple, sunny life before Napoleon and his troops turned up to cloud things. To represent the French we have the Marseillaise. Purists have jumped on this fact as a glaring anachronism, since the Marseillaise was not in use during Napoleon's time. In fact he banned it, and it was not restored as France's national anthem until the 1870s.

But at least nobody has suggested replacing the Marseillaise in the *1812* with something else. The Soviets, on the other hand, had no compunction about meddling. In the final pages of the *1812* Tchaikovsky quotes from the Russian imperial national anthem, 'Bozhe, tsarya khrani' ('God, Save the Tsar'), blasted out by horns in an affirmation of Russian victory. The fact that 'God, Save the Tsar' was not in use during Napoleonic times, any more than the Marseillaise was, did not in itself raise hackles in the Soviet hierarchy. The trouble was that, during the Communist era, ideological paranoia could not tolerate



Napoleon's retreat from Moscow in 1812 'inspired' Tchaikovsky


a reference to Russia's tsarist past. So, what did the authorities do? They simply cut out the offending 10 bars and replaced them with the tune of the 'Slavysya!' ('Glory!') chorus from the epilogue of Glinka's opera *Ivan Susanin* (later called *A Life for the Tsar*). To appreciate what it sounds like, we can turn to Nikolai Golovanov's 1948 recording of the *1812* with the Moscow Radio Symphony Orchestra (EMI/IMG CZS5 75112-2, 6/02). There is no other reason to listen to this chaotic performance, but it is worth seeking out just to hear how the politically uncontroversial snippet of Glinka, a paean to Russia rather than to the tsar, is slotted into Tchaikovsky's scheme: it's on track seven at 13'40", or from bar 388 in the printed score.

Over the years, some other practitioners have taken the opportunity to embellish Tchaikovsky's ideas rather than blue-pencil them. Herbert von Karajan was an admirer of the Don Cossack Choir, particularly its capacity for power and attack, and on his 1966 recording for DG he decided to capitalise on the ensemble's qualities and obvious Russian credentials by recasting the first 02'43" (or 36 bars) of the *1812* for voices instead of the lower strings at the start and the subsequent dialogue between strings and woodwind. With the orchestra entering at bar 34 to emphasise the C minor cadence, this is an atmospheric and effective device, not specially difficult to organise since it only involved adding the 'God, Preserve Thy People' text to the melody and slightly rearranging the texture to suit voices rather than instruments. The American conductor Igor Buketoff, son of a Russian Orthodox priest, went a stage further on his 1960s RCA Victor recording with the New Philharmonia Orchestra, a disc long since deleted but still available from some dealers. Not only did he deploy voices for the opening chant but he also had a children's chorus to sing the folk tune 'By the Gates' and brought the choir back to bolster the chant and the Russian national anthem at the end. It is not beyond the bounds of possibility that Tchaikovsky would have approved of these extras, because at one stage during the brief time he thought anything at all about the *1812* he had it in mind to compose a work with chorus.

Early recordings of the *1812* found that the 16 cannon shots near the end presented an acoustical and logistical snag: the solution was either to leave them out or to put in

'DORATI'S PERFORMANCE REMAINS A YARDSTICK EVEN AFTER ALMOST 60 YEARS'

something that sounded more like a harmless air rifle. By the 1960s, stereo technology and editing procedures made it possible for proper explosive booms to be recorded elsewhere and then integrated into the performance in the studio, a fact of which Karajan takes full advantage on his 1966 recording, timing the shots precisely as Tchaikovsky notated them in the score. But the breakthrough had come a decade earlier with the 1954 stereo recording that Antal Dorati made with the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra, using a muzzle-loaded bronze French cannon of 1775 from the US Military Academy at West Point, New York, and, moreover, the 74-bell carillon at Riverside Church. The cannon shots were recorded – with ambulance crew on hand – in the grounds of West Point, and when the carillon was taped three times on a spring day in New York it provoked a deluge of phone calls from local residents enquiring whether such an unanticipated clamour signified some occurrence of joy or tragedy. The effort and disturbance were worth it because, with cannon and carillon edited in, Dorati's recording became a landmark in terms of realising the effects that the score of the *1812* requires. As a performance, too, it remains a yardstick even after almost 60 years.

If Tchaikovsky himself only reluctantly acknowledged the popularity of the *1812*, it has perennially triggered caustic criticism from commentators, one of whom, Ralph W Wood in *Tchaikovsky: A Symposium* of 1945, described it as 'one of the most dreary and repulsive works in the whole of music', 'noisy, vulgar and empty'. Tchaikovsky might have agreed, but in the right festive circumstances or on a recording of the calibre of a Karajan or Dorati there is no harm in admitting that it might give us an innocent thrill. 

Karajan, below, chose to begin his 1812 recording with the voices of the Don Cossack Choir



RECOMMENDED RECORDINGS



Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra / Antal Dorati
Decca (M) 475 8508 (12/95R)

A pioneering disc as regards the synchronisation of cannon and bells, and still a performance to be reckoned with.



Chicago Symphony Orchestra / Georg Solti
Decca (M) 2 455 8102DF2

Part of a two-disc Tchaikovsky set in which Solti and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra perform the *1812* with drive and drama.



Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra / Herbert von Karajan
DG (E) 463 6142GOR (12/00)

Karajan uses a chorus for the opening Orthodox chant passage, a facet thoroughly at one with a powerful, discriminating performance.



Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra and Chorus / Neeme Järvi
DG (E) 439 4682GCL

Järvi deploys the chorus at the beginning and end of the *1812*, significantly raising the music's emotional temperature.

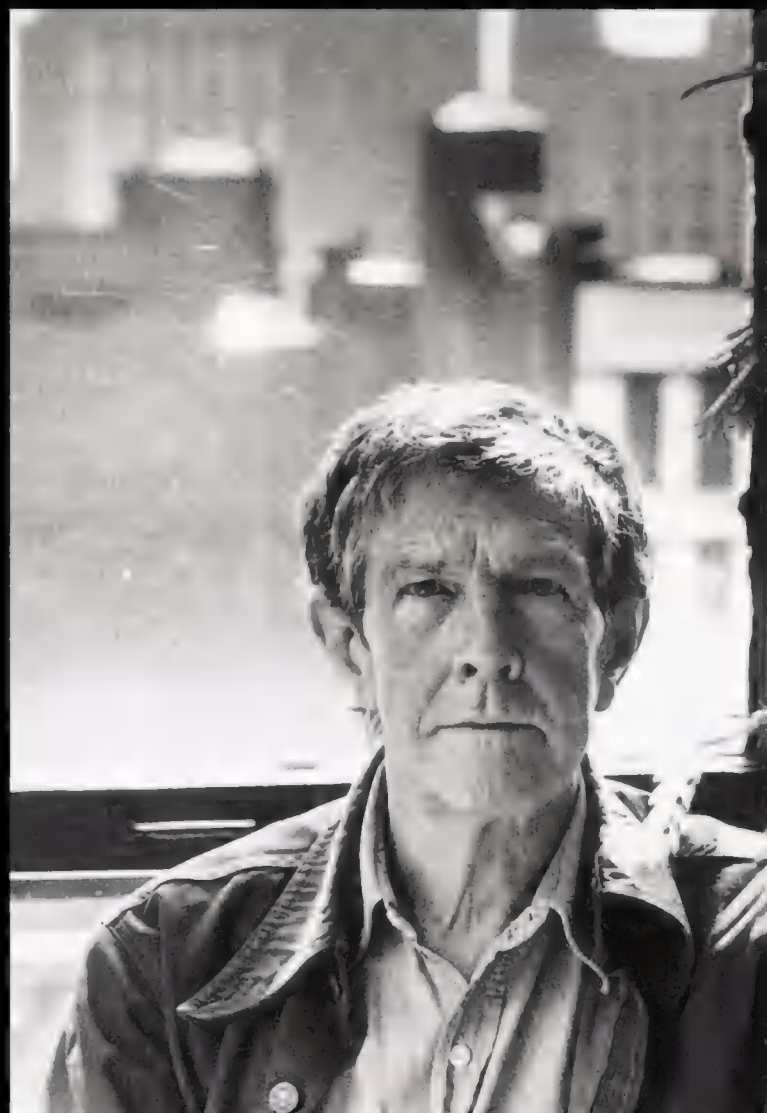
MANHATTAN MUSIC

John Cage was more excited by traffic noise on Sixth Avenue than by the music of Mozart. Philip Clark absorbs the sounds surrounding the composer's New York apartment to understand why Cage wrote what he did

Were every celebrity residence in Manhattan marked with a blue plaque, the weight of extra metal would likely send skyscrapers crashing down through the East Coast seaboard, flattening the honeycomb of subway lines that sprawl underneath with the resonant impact of so many names, dates, achievements and moments in time that changed the world. And yet it feels wrong to be standing on the corner of West 18th Street and Sixth Avenue – 101-105 West 18th Street where John Cage and his partner, the dancer and choreographer Merce Cunningham, occupied the entire top-floor loft space of a building that once housed the B Altman and Company department store – and for there to be no lingering imprint left of two remarkable men and the lives they lived there.

I peer through the handsome double-breasted front door. A face glares back. Cellphone encased in sweaty palm, pink corporate shirt, tie bunched at one side, like an extra from *The Bonfire of the Vanities*, a dude making a deal. I wonder if he grasps the cultural importance of the building in which he stands? If he might understand why a UK-based music writer would choose to fly three-and-a-half thousand miles simply to stand in this spot? To listen, observe, experience those same sounds that Cage heard out of his window and then talked up in elevated terms that most people use to describe music: 'If you listen to Mozart and Beethoven, it's always the same,' he claimed. 'But if you listen to the traffic here on Sixth Avenue, it's always different.'

This year, 2012, is the centenary of Cage's birth. But, in the authentic Cageian spirit, I should have been bold enough to generate a magic random number to celebrate instead. Happy 99th and three months, or 103rd birthday, John! When Cage and Cunningham moved into their lower Manhattan loft in 1978, Cage was standing at a creative crossroads. He was 66 and *Sonatas and Interludes*, *Concert for Piano and Orchestra*, *Fontana Mix* and *4'33"* – pieces which had frogmarched everything 'classical' music stood for in the opposite direction, over a cliff edge basically, were now decades old. They had status. They were avant-garde 'classics', an unsettling paradox which left Cage with profoundly ambivalent feelings. The trajectory between *Sonatas and Interludes* and *4'33"* traces his aesthetic journey in microcosm. *Sonatas and Interludes*, completed in 1948, made good on the founding keyboard experiments



Above: Cage loved the sounds of Manhattan where 'the traffic on Sixth Avenue is always different'

Far right: with dancer Merce Cunningham in 1978; they met at the Cornish School of the Arts in Seattle and enjoyed a lifelong personal and working relationship

Right: by positioning objects inside a piano, Cage's prepared piano was 'a percussion instrument of make-believe'



JOHN CAGE: DEFINING MOMENTS

1912

Born in Los Angeles

1933

Studies with Schoenberg, who famously dubs him an 'inventor' rather than composer; moves to New York

1938

Meets his partner Merce Cunningham; trail-blazing percussion works begin to appear; first prepared piano pieces written in 1942

1951

Discovers the *I Ching*, which leads to Cage chancing chance with *Music of Changes* and *Williams Mix*

1952

shush...433"...

1961

Cage's book, *Silence*, explains his philosophy of composition and life

1969

HPSCHD and *Cheap Imitation* mark Cage's return to fully notated composition after pieces like *Variations II*, which are more suggestions for pieces

1987

Cage's final years are mostly concerned with his 'number' pieces and his so-called 'anarchic harmony'

1992

Cage dies of a stroke in Manhattan, one month before his 80th birthday

of Henry Cowell. By carefully positioning screws, nuts and erasers et al into the inside of a grand piano, his 'prepared piano' was a percussion instrument of make-believe. But Cage's rhythmic and melodic motifs still sounded like 'music'.

Concert for Piano and Orchestra and *Fontana Mix* (both 1958) were by a different Cage. When, in 1951, the composer Christian Wolff gave him a copy of the *I Ching*, the ancient Chinese 'Book of Changes', Cage's interest in chance procedures stepped up a gear. *Concert* is notated on 63 loose-leaf pages. Players can start anywhere, but – most radically – the spacing of notes on the stave is your guide about where to place sounds in time. Kiss adios to the narrative tension and release of directional harmony, shepherded by the interpretative goals of a conductor. And for all the soul-gazing provoked by his so-called 'silent' 4'33" (1952), that piece is simplicity itself. Cage offers listeners a performance situation analogous to 'music', but has stripped away all the apparatus of music.

And why? He would spend the rest of his life answering that question. But by placing environmental sound within a metaphorical frame, Cage was encouraging us to re-evaluate our assumptions about where music stops,

or starts, and where sound starts, or stops. Anyone who still reckons 4'33" is about silence can leave the room now.

In his book *A Year from Monday* (1967), Cage twisted the thumbscrews ever harder. 'I am less and less interested in music,' he wrote, '[because] I find environmental sounds and noises more aesthetically useful than the sounds produced by the world's musical cultures'; moreover, 'A composer is simply someone who tells other people what to do. I find this an unattractive way of getting things done.' During the 1970s, Cage flirted with the thoughts of Chairman Mao, while his belief in electronics representing the ultimate symbol of musical progress unravelled in proportion with his rising concern about the state of the planet. Pieces with titles like *Lecture on the Weather* (1975, for the triumphantly impractical combination of '12 speaker vocalists, preferably American men who have become Canadian citizens') and *Litany for the Whale* (1980, 'vocalise for two vocalists') began to appear; and by 1978, when he moved to West 18th Street, the case could be made that Cage's philosophical stance had become self-indulgent, muddled and unworkable.

For a composer who had purportedly lost the music bug, Cage was composing a lot of music. If the modality of *Litany for the Whale* feels slightly vanilla, a sequence of works all invoking the word 'etude' could momentarily, if you didn't know the full context, be mistaken for an adjunct to post-Darmstadt Euro-Modernism. *Etudes Australes* (solo piano, 1974-75), *Freeman Etudes* (solo violin, 1977-80) and



Etudes Boreales (cello with optional piano, 1978-80) were by a country mile the most technically taxing music Cage had written. Notes everywhere – talk about telling people what to do! But Cage dragged what he termed ‘the writing of difficult music’ into his aesthetic purview by reasoning that, in the current ‘hopeless’ world system, ‘impossible music... [might] induce somebody who had been impressed by this performance to change the world’.

Standing there on Cage’s street corner, I look up five floors to his one-time apartment and wonder what the heck was going on in his mind. When it comes to social and environmental change, violins and cellos and pianos are blunt tools. Why did he insist on framing his critique of society with music? If he believed his statements had real weight, why not do something else altogether? I try to forget I’m a sonic tourist and let the sound of Cage’s corner of Manhattan soak into my being. New York is the best-sounding city on the planet. Bucolic wilderness? Getting away from it all? Count me out of that. Stick your country walks! But I’ll hike New York sidewalks endlessly. I like the ghosts – the reassurance that generations of minds have worked out what goes where, carving up the available space so that people can live, work, create, exchange ideas. Sonically, the city is underscored by this basso profundo of jangling-people energy: voices, car horns, police whistles, the rattle of the subway, the smells, the sirens, refracted light bending around skyscrapers deliberately placed on the New York grid, all coming together to orchestrate this magnificent human music.

When Cage praised the sounds outside his window – once he mused that ‘traffic noise gets louder and quieter, higher and lower, longer and shorter. And I’m completely satisfied with that’ – did he mean it literally, or were we being invited to think laterally?

When George Gershwin and Leonard Bernstein needed to implant images of New York City into listeners’ minds, they drew on the associations of jazz. Flip forward a few decades and Steve Reich’s *City Life* constructed a sonic allegory for New York by embedding sampled recordings of the city’s ambience inside instrumental commentaries. We can be absolutely certain that Cage, had he thought about it at all, would have considered Bernstein’s and Gershwin’s New York to be hopelessly romanticised, and my guess is he’d have wondered why Reich bothered polluting his beautiful field recordings with ‘music’.

Jazz is a metaphor in *West Side Story*; in *City Life*, sound becomes dramatised. Cage was interested in neither. ‘I love sounds just as they are,’ he said. ‘I have no need for them to be anything more. I don’t want them to be psychological, I don’t want a sound to pretend to be a bucket, or that it’s President, or that it is in love with another sound. I just want it to be a sound.’

Look at the sequence of eight photographs at the top of this page. I snapped them with my iPhone on April 10, 2012, as a visual representation of how the Cageian spirit works – a photographic mock-up. Cage’s apartment runs along the top; his front door is to the far left of the picture, just beyond where that stony coloured shop awning juts out. Standing on the opposite corner, I decided to take a sequence of 14 photographs – one for every year Cage lived at the address – over four minutes and 33 seconds, and divide the time up accordingly. *Gramophone*’s editor, Martin Cullingford, then told me that eight photographs would be the optimum number that could snake across a page, and so I let one



‘TRAFFIC NOISE
GETS LOUDER
AND QUIETER...
I’M SATISFIED
WITH THAT’

I

TACET

II

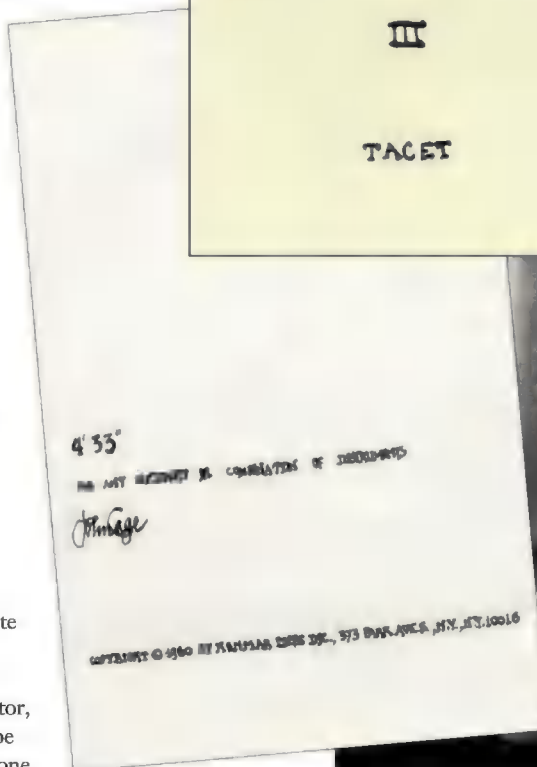
TACET

III

TACET

Top: Entering the Cageian spirit, Philip Clark takes 14 photographs of Cage’s apartment over the course of four minutes and 33 seconds, and then his cat selects eight at random, shown here. Would Cage have approved?

Left: the score of *4’33”*, the very work that inspired Philip Clark. Each movement is marked ‘tacet’ (silent) and, on the title page, the composer (below) writes with typical irony: ‘For any instrument in combination of instruments’





of my cats, Willow, make an editorial decision. I put prints of all 14 images on the floor. You're looking at the first eight she sniffed. So far, so random.

I believe Cage would have approved. By deciding to apply a sequence of calculations – part arbitrary, part symbolic – to my chosen material (an image of his apartment), and because of Willow's randomised sniffs, narrative continuity is destroyed. Cage's harmony works like that too. In *Rozart Mix* (1965), *HPSCHD* (1967–69) and *Apartment House 1776* (1976), chance procedures dice, chop and reshuffle tonal source material so that you hear the 'sound' of tonal music, but without the connecting tissue. Chords we hear instinctively as needing to lean on others are robbed of their function. Cadence points have no meaning. Musical punctuation scatters. Questions are posed like why would a writer choose to end a paragraph in a magazine article with a semi-colon;

Cage's notoriously mulish stance against Beethoven and jazz/improvised music was grounded in that same attitude. In Beethoven and jazz, the harmony is lined up so that, as he once put it, the sounds 'talk to each other'; and the problem with sounds talking is that they tell stories which, however profound, detract from the fabric of the sound itself. And arguably my sequence of photographs says more about four minutes and 33 seconds in the life of Cage's building than rolling footage could, when the medium of film itself becomes the story. Where would this imaginary film begin – where's its middle, when will it end? Would there be clues about when it was shot? Flared pants might suggest 1978, but the man walking the opposite way is talking on his mobile. Still we've learnt nothing about Cage's building.

But my eight snapshots locate the building in time by making us aware of the activity around it. A single taxi passes by; or the building is temporarily shrouded behind a richly harmonised chorus of vehicles. And then random procedures deal up a wider truth. In film, as in harmony, nothing happening is a problem. Art is useless when it comes to expressing nothing. In life, though, nothing happens with great urgency. One photograph allows this fact to be, as my shutter comes down just as nothing passes by the building. As Cage once said: 'Which is more musical, a truck passing by a factory or a truck passing by a music school?'

A friend tells me that Cage walked most days to buy provisions from the food market on Union Square at 14th Street. Following in his footsteps, I think about how deeply New York formed Cage. Perhaps his decision to structure his ideas as music was ultimately a disappointing cop-out, belying the fact that, at one level, Cage was more of a composer than he was prepared to admit. There are those who argue that his legacy

has left a certain type of composer tied in knots: composers like Michael Pisaro, Radu Malfatti and Jürg Frey whose work riffs off silence and who, the argument goes, prioritise theory and system over music as a social, interactive activity.

And that tired critical cliché doggedly persists: Cage's ideas are more important than his music apparently, when all pointers suggest the exact opposite is true. Anyone who can make statements complaining about

composers 'telling people what to do' while thinking, however briefly, that Mao represented liberation and beauty might not be an ideas man to trust. The British composer/improviser Cornelius Cardew's descent into Maoism represented the end of the road for his life as thinking, creative musician as he turned political activist. But Cage's belief in the dignity and intrinsic worth of sound rescued him from the same fate: he'd never have allowed politics to interfere with this basic

credo – sound for Cage was everything, and he indulged New York and the city indulged him.

I arrive at Union Square and laugh. Alongside music and Marcel Duchamp, mushrooms vied for Cage's affection because, he said, music and Marcel Duchamp and mushrooms all begin with the letter 'M'. Randomly, the first thing I see is a mushroom stall and I think, wow, New York sure sounds like John Cage. **G**

WHICH IS MORE MUSICAL A TRUCK PASSING A FACTORY OR A MUSIC SCHOOL?

FOUR CAGE RECORDINGS TO EXPLORE

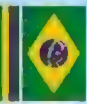
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VIVA LA MÚSICA!



São Paulo's orchestra and its unique concert hall are set to attract even bigger audiences with Marin Alsop at the helm. James Jolly witnesses the new partnership that's already yielding exciting results



Sitting down with a former head of state to talk culture doesn't happen every day. Yet somehow it seems entirely appropriate to be at a large table with the erstwhile president of Brazil, Fernando Henrique Cardoso. Not only did he lead the country during two terms from 1995 to 2002, but he is the man credited with mastering Brazil's rampant economy and setting the country on the road to becoming one of the world's great economic powerhouses. It's hard to imagine a Bill Clinton or a Tony Blair bestowing patronage on a symphony orchestra, but Cardoso, an urbane man of evident culture, heads the board of the Foundation of the São Paulo Symphony Orchestra (OSESF; or Orquestra Sinfônica do Estado de São Paulo to give it its full name), and dispenses his wisdom with quiet authority and a dry wit. The occasion that has granted a group of journalists from

Europe an audience with Cardoso is the inauguration of a new reign at the OSESF – the first concert with Marin Alsop as chief conductor of this fine Brazilian orchestra.

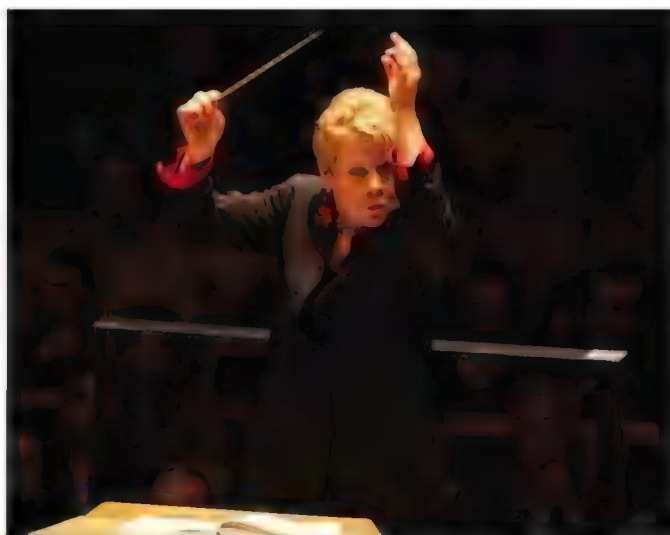
Cardoso believes that high culture is a vital part of this huge country's renascent status: 'You could not imagine humanity only in terms of GDP, the growth of the economy. We have to express sentiments, and Brazil has a very rich culture. We have been capable of producing important cultural manifestations, in different aspects: in painting, in theatre, in music, in carnival. So this shows what sort of people we are – a people who love to be in contact with other cultures, but also a part of universal culture by being our own cultural resource. It's as important to show this as to show that we have the capacity to be sophisticated.'

Brazil is indeed a cultural melting pot with a huge proportion of the

PHOTOGRAPHY: ALESSANDRA FRATUS;
STEFAN SCHMELING, SHUTTERSTOCK

Left: the exterior of Sala São Paulo, ■ former railway station

Right and below: inside the Sala, visitors are wowed by both the coffee flower mosaic floor and the state-of-the-art concert hall



population tracing its roots to Europe, Africa or Asia within a few generations. And few organisations illustrate this better than a symphony orchestra which pretty well every day draws its creative sustenance from very different cultures. The inaugural concert features not only the American conductor and a French pianist, but also music by a Brazilian, an Austrian and a Russian. São Paulo – many hours' flying time from both North America and Europe – feels genuinely connected. And it's a vast city: the biggest in the southern hemisphere and the Americas, and up among the handful of largest cities in the world (either No 3 or No 7, depending on who you listen to). And what's really striking when you sit down and talk to *paulistanos* (as people from São Paulo are known) is their palpable ambition – not for the individual (as you would expect in North America, and increasingly in Europe), but for the city or the state.

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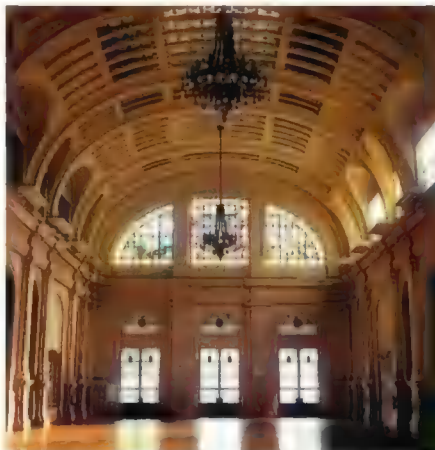
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Spectacular: Sala São Paulo's Estação das Artes

People have a genuine pride in what their country has achieved and what it intends to achieve.

São Paulo is a rich city built on coffee; and coffee plays an important (if now secondary) role at the city's current cultural epicentre, the glorious Sala São Paulo. Formerly a railway station, it is now a concert hall that would bring a blush of shame to most of the great cultural capitals of the world – London very much included. The early decades of the 20th century are key to the story: coffee was grown on plantations surrounding São Paulo and brought by train into the city, where it was traded in the neoclassical exchange of the Júlio Prestes railway station. Today, a mosaic in the floor reminds a younger generation of the brown gold that powered the city. Marin Alsop – more likely to be clutching a can of Diet Coke than a high-octane espresso – is only too aware of the city's heritage and what it has achieved, and what it will unlock in the future. She clearly responds to the orchestra's hunger, and one senses that this very 21st-century maestro will give back to her supporters in São Paulo a comparable passion and commitment, as well as a pretty savvy grasp of PR.

Alsop is as much a fan of her new ensemble as they are of her. 'They're eager, they're keen,' she tells me. 'They're enthusiastic, they have a passion. I feel it's interesting for me, especially, because they have this intense musicality. I try not to read into it clichés such as "they're South American, so they must have this South American fervour", but I really feel it! They're very dedicated and they work hard and they enjoy what they do.'

That passion and enthusiasm will very soon be visible on a world stage, for Alsop and the OSESP are coming to the BBC Proms as part of a brief European tour. (It's ironic that Alsop's other ensemble, the Baltimore Symphony, that lithe and highly adaptable band among North America's orchestras, had to pull out of a European visit due to a lack of funds.) At the Proms the São Paulo orchestra will be treating us to a feast that celebrates the Americas: Dvořák's *New World* Symphony as well as works by Copland, Joan Tower, Ginastera and Villa-Lobos (his piano concerto *Momoprécocce*). It's a skilfully programmed menu that caters for different tastes and which, perhaps more importantly, nicely shows off the orchestra's strengths.

The latter couldn't be more adeptly handled than in the choice of repertoire with which Alsop throws down the musical gauntlet to record collectors: a cycle of the Prokofiev symphonies for Naxos, recorded in the Sala São Paulo. 'Prokofiev is a composer who offers the



Taking a breather: the orchestra has a hectic annual schedule, which includes outdoor concerts, touring and recording

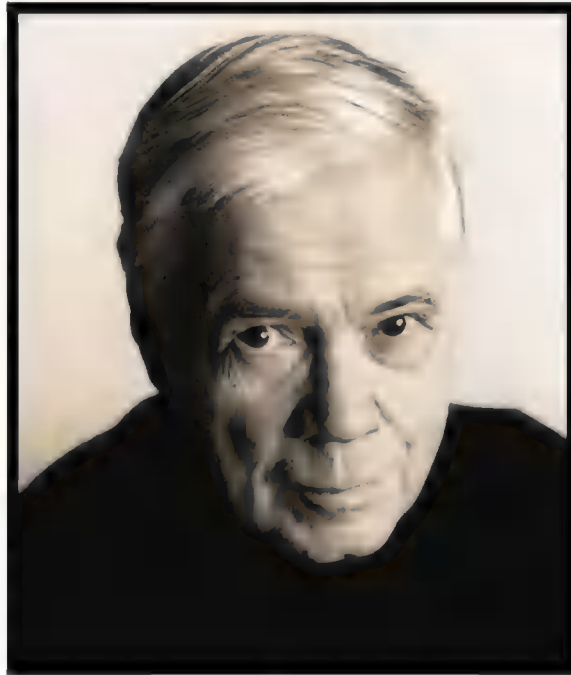
'THE SÃO PAULO PLAYERS WORK HARD AND ENJOY WHAT THEY DO' – MARIN ALSOP

orchestra an enormous range,' she says. 'This is music that challenges them on every level, but also gives them the opportunity to show off: it's got great solo and *tutti* writing. And stylistically it runs the gamut from gems of simplicity to a very complex, dense approach – angular music, very rhythmic music. So I think Prokofiev provides a perfect opportunity to showcase this orchestra on the world's stages where they haven't been before. We started with the Fifth Symphony, which I guess was something of a bold choice, but I think you'll hear the immense passion that they have – and the sound of the concert hall, which is spectacular!'

The Sala São Paulo, whose inaugural concert was in 1999, is a magnificent creation, a totally convincing transformation by Brazilian (indeed *paulistano*) architect Nelson Dupré which contains at its heart a stunning hall, very much in the traditional shoebox shape, that feels both old and new. The former winter garden of the station, where the posh folk would wait for their train, conforms to the traditional proportions that have made halls such as Boston's Symphony Hall, Amsterdam's Concertgebouw and Vienna's Musikverein the understated acoustic marvels that they are. A roof had to be fitted over the formerly open-air central space, and with some acoustic wizardry from the world-famous Artec company (who contributed so magically to halls in Birmingham, Dallas, Montreal and many more) the winter garden stepped up to become one of the finest halls of today. Its ceiling is entirely made of movable wooden units, which can be lowered through a staggering 18 metres to create a space suitable for chamber music; and when the ceiling is raised to its highest level (revealing some striking stained glass from the building's former life) it creates a large space with a near-ideal acoustic. It works splendidly for the substantial forces and considerable volume called upon by Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony – the core work in Alsop's opening concert this March. The use of a beautiful, pale and very dense native wood called *pão marfim* makes the hall feel very light,

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Passionate and committed: conductor Marin Alsop, baton at the ready

ALSOP'S FLARE FOR COLOUR AND RHYTHM MAKES THIS REPERTOIRE A PERFECT FIT

the new wood juxtaposed powerfully with the solid, stucco work with its striking Corinthian columns.

The Sala São Paulo also serves as the administrative headquarters of the orchestra, as I discover when I meet the OSESP's executive director, Marcelo Lopes, and artistic director, Arthur Nestrovski. Both are professional musicians (Lopes an OSESP trumpeter and Nestrovski a fine guitarist in a popular vein), and both talk with that typically Brazilian blend of pride and ambition that I have come to recognise from *paulistanos*. Nestrovski, who has been with the orchestra for three years, outlines the OSESP Foundation's head-spinning workload. 'This year the orchestra alone will play 135 performances in Sala São Paulo plus outdoor concerts, touring and recordings. In addition we have the chamber orchestra series, the string quartet series, the chamber choir series and various chamber groups formed by musicians from the orchestra. We commission at least five works by Brazilian composers every year. And we have published more than a hundred works by Brazilian composers. We also have internet, television and radio broadcasts, and educational projects that will bring 100,000 children into the hall this year. So you need someone to try and bring it all together.'

The São Paulo Symphony Orchestra was founded in 1954 and soon established itself as the largest, and finest, symphony orchestra in South America. For record collectors, the name most closely associated with it is John Neschling, the man largely credited with raising the

ensemble's standards and putting it on the international map; his discs for BIS have been very well received. But a power struggle ensued, strong personalities faced off, and Neschling left at the end of what was clearly a bruising confrontation – it's evidently still a touchy subject in and around the Sala. But Neschling built up a following for the orchestra, and as a result, explains Lopes, even the local appetite for orchestral music can occasionally cause concern. 'Seventy per cent of our audience are subscribers, which is quite good. But that's really the highest we can go because we must have some tickets for single buyers – to allow new people to experience the concerts. If we didn't do this we'd sell every ticket before the season even started!'

Asked how he defines the orchestra, Nestrovski – who speaks immaculate English, as you might expect from someone with music degrees from the universities of York and Iowa – delivers an answer that has clearly been well rehearsed. 'Being an orchestra in Brazil adds a whole raft of elements to just being an orchestra. São Paulo is a rich state but it's always had this impetus of innovation, modernity, excellence – a cosmopolitan world view. It's about not only being open to other cultures but also actively working towards integrating them into something else that we call Brazil. This is the very spirit of the Brazilian modernists who were based in São Paulo in the 1920s.'

For Alsop, who's no stranger to challenging the traditional concert set-up, her new post has opened her ears to a genre of music that – considering her well-known flare for rhythm and colour – should be a perfect fit. 'I'm very happy to have the excuse to explore South American music with them, as the Villa-Lobos piece we're playing at the Proms shows. This is repertoire I previously had no exposure to, but I'm now exploring the works of [Carmago] Guarneri and composers you simply don't run across in North America and Europe: [Manuel Alejandro] Prada, for instance – a wonderful composer. And the orchestra's commitment to commissioning new works by Brazilian composers is an incredible opportunity to meet and nurture young Brazilian talent.'

For her inaugural concert, before a packed Sala, Marin Alsop unveils a new work by the young Brazilian Clarice Assad (a member of the famous musical Assad family) which riffs on the Brazilian National Anthem. The audience love it, and for those of us with a less-than-instant grasp of the piece's 'theme', it provides a great chance to witness a marriage between conductor and orchestra that's setting hearts beating just a little faster. **G** This month, the OSESP and Marin Alsop will be giving concerts at the BBC Proms (August 15), the Snape Proms (August 16), the Rheingau Musik Festival (August 18) and the Concertgebouw, Amsterdam (August 19)

► Edward Seckerson reviews the OSESP's new disc of Prokofiev's Fifth Symphony and *The Year 1941* on page 50



RECOMMENDED RECORDINGS



Liszt
Piano Concertos
Arnaldo Cohen pf
OSESP / John Neschling

BIS Ⓢ BIS-SACD1530 (10/07)
For unapologetic bravura, Cohen and his cohorts are hard to beat.



Tchaikovsky, Medtner
First Piano Concertos
Yevgeny Sudbin pf
OSESP / John Neschling

BIS Ⓢ BIS-SACD1588 (5/07)
The São Paulo SO under John Neschling respond infectiously to their radiant soloist.



Schmitt
Psalm 47
OSESP and Choir /
Yan Pascal Tortelier

Chandos Ⓢ CHSA5090 (9/11)
Tortelier relishes the rich Wagnerian colours and directs a radiant account of this grand rhetorical work.



Villa-Lobos
Bachianas Brasileiras,
Nos 7-9
OSESP / Roberto Minczuk

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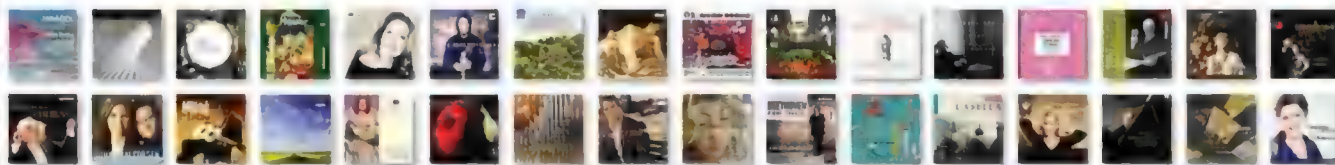
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GRAMOPHONE *Reviews*

August 2012



Giovanni Sollima and I Turchini recording concertos from Naples at the city's Sala del Vasari ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 55**

KEY TO SYMBOLS



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GRAMOPHONE *Reviewers*



David Thresher

I used to devour the opinions of *Gramophone's* initial reviewers on idle Saturday afternoons at the red-brick Central Library in the West Country seaside town of my teenage years. It was being addressed, through those inky pages, as a musically aware adult that fired my interest in this sonic world we inhabit. There was certainly no encouragement from my bog-standard comprehensive, where artistic ambition and individualism were snootily squashed. No: practical ideas of musicality and musicianship came from the church choir in which I sang and from the instrumental lessons scripped and saved for by my parents. These are the truly happy memories of childhood.

Mozart came first, then Haydn (Symphony No 89, set as a task at college in London). Not to mention all the composers of the late 18th century who *weren't* Mozart and Haydn: Kraus, Vanhal and the euphoniously named Florian Leopold Gassmann, the subject of my thesis. Work with regional record companies and festivals engendered a love of chamber music.

Now I find myself footloose and freelance, reviewing and sub-editing for this title and elsewhere. *Gramophone*, all those years ago, instilled a love of great writing about great music. Upholding those high standards remains an eternal challenge and pleasure – just like the greatest of great music.

Andrew Achenbach
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Mike Ashman
Philip Clark
Rob Cowan*
Jeremy Dibble
Peter Dickinson
Jed Distler
Duncan Druce
Adrian Edwards
Richard Fairman
David Fallows
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Fabrice Fitch
Jonathan
Freeman-Attwood
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Edward Greenfield
David Gutman
Lindsay Kemp
Philip Kennicott
Tess Knighton
Andrew Lamb
Richard Lawrence
Ivan March

Ivan Moody
Bryce Morrison
Jeremy Nicholas
Christopher Nickol
Geoffrey Norris
Richard Osborne
Stephen Plalstow
Peter Quantrell
Guy Rickards
Malcolm Riley
Marc Rochester
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Harriet Smith
Ken Smith
David Patrick Stearns
David Thresher
David Vickers
John Warrack
Richard Whitehouse
Arnold Whittall
Richard Wigmore
William Yeoman

* Contributing Editor

Recording of the Month



'Gardiner challenges orthodoxy in how these a cappella holy grails are fundamentally signposted with persuasive passion and genuine zeal'

Jonathan Freeman-Attwood praises Gardiner's groundbreaking Bach Motets

JS Bach

Six Motets, BWV225-30. Ich lasse dich nicht, du segnest mich denn, BWV Anh 159

Monteverdi Choir / John Eliot Gardiner

SDG © SDG716 (72' • DDD). Recorded live at

St John's, Smith Square, London, October 2011

Underpinning so much of Sir John Eliot Gardiner's approach to Bach is identifying the provenance and essence of dramatic character, 'mutant opera' (as Gardiner calls it) found in genres – like the motet – which are not enacted but depend on perceptive rhetorical judgement within a fabric of rolling continuity. Bach's motets may pay homage to forebears in scale, tone and technique but each one, especially revealed in this vibrant and questing new set, presses for fresh meaning with all the virtuoso means Bach could muster.

The motets have appeared as pillars of the Monteverdi Choir's existence over five decades, punctuated by a notable recording for Erato in the early 1980s and most recently within selected programmes during the millennial Cantata Pilgrimage. For Gardiner, these works represent an endlessly fascinating tapestry of discovery which will doubtless continue to evolve, a body enhanced by the addition of *Ich lasse dich nicht* – a short motet once thought to have been by Bach's great elder cousin,

Johann Christoph, but now considered the work of the Young Turk.

Common to the Monteverdi Choir's performances over the years are their inimitable textual projection, clarity of line, rhythmic rigour and an overriding sense of expectancy and flair, just occasionally slipping a little too eagerly into exaggerated gesture. Gardiner asks for more pinpoint delicacy, quicksilver contrast and lightness than ever and illuminatingly inward *da camera* dialoguing between voices. For all the pages of sprung bravura and purpose, especially in *Lobet den Herrn* and *Singet dem Herrn*, there are as many periods of elongated and poignant restraint.

There is no more compelling example than the soft, controlled climate of the final contemplative strains of *Fürchte dich nicht*, where we have an extraordinary representation of the precious mystery of belonging to Christ. The soprano motif on 'und dein Blut, mir zugut' ('thy life and thy blood') is uttered with such sustained and ritualised other-worldliness (track 15, 5'38") that the risk of disembodiment is only allayed by the Monteverdi Choir's captivating certainty of line as the devoted soul drifts heavenwards.

One of the most striking features in this new collection, as I mentioned previously, is how attentive Gardiner is to the individuality

of each of the motets. This might seem a time-honoured ambition and yet, for all the admirable qualities of, say, the RIAS Kammerchor under René Jacobs or the more recent reading from Philippe Herreweghe and Collegium Vocale Gent, neither of these brings as ambitious a kaleidoscopic challenge to the listener in identifying renewed character and meaning as Gardiner aspires to. Indeed, Herreweghe recently went as far as to say that 'a groundbreaking reading is not necessary'.

Gardiner would disagree. How lucidly *Der Geist hilft* (that short but compact work written for the funeral of Ernesti, the old Rector of St Thomas's, in 1729) sets out to reflect the infirmities of man gradually imbued with the intercessions of the Holy Spirit. Here we have something more perspicacious than merely good pacing: the Monteverdi singers narrate this play of uncertainty and the growing anticipation of understanding God's will with such corporate and dynamic purpose that, even when the two choirs converge in an affirming four-part double fugue, we never feel quite out of the woods. The tantalising prospect of salvation is only truly satisfied at the final cadence of a luminously directed chorale.

Some of these interpretative risks may not suit those who prefer a less articulated, more



The Monteverdi Choir: renowned for their textual projection, clarity of line and rhythmic rigour



Gardiner presses for fresh meaning in Bach's motets

abstract, soft-edged and generally expansive landscape. *Singet dem Herrn* is typically exuberant in its outer 'concerti' but the unique double-choir juxtaposition of chorale and free contrapuntal 'rhapsody' could perhaps have yielded more genuine contemplative warmth. Indeed, Gardiner rarely delivers a comfortable ride and yet what brilliant visions emerge, most strikingly in the central work, the five-part *Jesu meine Freude*, riding – literally – the storm of the love of the flesh, Satan, the old dragon and death.

Throughout this masterpiece, terrifying, quasi-'turba' (crowd) scenes are viscerally offset against an ethereal quest for redemption. 'Es ist nun nichts Verdammliches' ('There

is now no condemnation') has surely never enjoyed such a mesmerising volley of declamation and rich illusion over a short space as Gardiner summons, while 'Trotz dem alten Drachen' ('Despite the old dragon') spits out its irascible consonances only to be disarmingly defied by the elevated purity of 'in gar sichrer Ruh' ('in confident tranquillity') – all this in contrasting tableaux of ever-surprising emotional impact. If the listener is often left gasping, this is caused not only by vocal singularity of purpose but by the discreet and graphic responsiveness of the instrumental continuo players, among whom the bassoon here (and in *Komm, Jesu, komm*) contributes with knowing effect.

As you would imagine, surprises abound – some of which take a little getting used to. Gardiner challenges orthodoxy in how these *a cappella* holy grails are fundamentally signposted and he does so, almost always, with persuasive passion and genuine zeal. High-wire artist Philippe Petit is a fitting cover image to this important landmark in highly recommended, high-stakes performances. **G**

Motets – selected comparison:

Gardiner (10/81⁸) (ERAT) 2292 45979-2

Jacobs (7/97) (HARM) HMC90 1589

Herreweghe (10/11) (PHI) LPH002

Listening points

Your guide to the disc's memorable moments

Track 3: 'Der aber die Herzen', (from BWV226), from 3'16"

Such steady, unforced and well-judged singing of this great double-fugue, which is often pushed or plain lumpy.

Track 8: 'Trotz dem alten Drachen' (from BWV227)

The coherence and contrast of rage sublimated by peace and tranquillity reveals a vintage Monteverdi Choir with quixotic change of mood.

Track 12: 'Gute nacht' (from BWV227)

Almost a motet within a motet, this luminous and exquisitely voiced

reading captures, like few others, the pious disciple who rejects the world.

Track 18: 'Lobet den Herrn' (from BWV225), from 1'21"

This is the final fugue on 'Let everything that hath breath praise God' and it skips with virtuoso melismas of infectious joy to a rousing conclusion.

Track 19: 'Ich lasse dich nicht' (BWV Anh 159), from 1'54"

This archaic motet was inspired, at the very least, by Bach's great forebear cousin, Johann Christoph Bach (1642-1703), and the end of the first section is spellbindingly poignant.



Visit the Gramophone Player at gramophone.co.uk to hear an excerpt from this issue's Recording of the Month

Orchestral



Duncan Druce is delighted by Rachel Podger's Vivaldi:

'Podger plays with her customary beauty of tone, purity of tuning and lively variety of articulation' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 53**



Jeremy Nicholas discovers the concertos of Adolf Wiklund:

'Wiklund is, by and large, joyfully unaffected by 20th-century musical trends'

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 55**

Brahms • Elgar

Brahms Symphony No 3, Op 90^a

Elgar Symphony No 1, Op 55^b

BBC Symphony Orchestra / Sir Adrian Boult

ICA Classics (C) ICAC5063 (81' • ADD)

Recorded live at the Royal Albert Hall, London,

^bJuly 1976; ^aAugust 1977



Boult live at the Proms with his last Elgar First Symphony

'First CD release' proclaims the artwork – an assertion that only holds true for the Brahms, its bedfellow having already emerged within a lavishly packaged limited-edition box from IMP Masters celebrating the centenary of the Proms in 1995. There's a fraction greater warmth to the string timbre in that earlier transfer; but either way Boult's July 1976 account of Elgar's First Symphony (the last of his six at the Proms) simply demands to be experienced. With the BBC SO playing their hearts out for their distinguished founder, this is a traversal of towering perception, possessing an edge-of-seat thrust, entrancing wholeness of vision and extraordinary emotional candour not quite equalled by any of Sir Adrian's three commercial recordings. Indeed, the sense of joyous homecoming in the closing pages is truly overwhelming in its cumulative impact and rightly accorded a thunderous ovation.

There's much that is cherishable, too, in the performance of Brahms's Third that these same artists gave the following season. Again, Boult's contribution evinces a sureness of purpose, unassuming honesty and lofty wisdom that stem from a lifetime's experience on the podium (the finale builds unerringly to a sublimely radiant apotheosis), and he draws playing from his former charges that is as glowingly committed as it is attentive (the *Andante* glides along to disarmingly songful and tender effect). By and large, the 88-year-old maestro conducts with a steadier hand on the structural tiller than on the much-loved studio version he had set down for EMI with the LSO some seven years previously, in which respect the reading harks back to his 1954 mono recording for Nixa – albeit with a more cultured response than that which the LPO of the period were able to muster. Martin

Cotton supplies a personable and authoritative booklet-note for this generous coupling that shows the veteran Boult at his inimitable best. Absolutely not to be missed.

Andrew Achenbach

Bruckner

Symphony No 5 (ed Nowak)

Lucerne Festival Orchestra / Claudio Abbado

Accentus (C) DVD ACC20243; (C) ACC10243

(81' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080p • DTS-HD MA,

DTS 5.1 & PCM stereo • O)

Recorded live at the Concert Hall of KKL Luzern,

August 2011



Abbado's orchestra at home with Bruckner last summer

'Involvement' is the keyword here, Claudio Abbado himself relaxed (or seemingly so), alert, exultant or visibly pleased as suits the moment, and always in clear command of his forces, though I doubt that such a modest man would approve of the word 'command'. The orchestra, a superb body of players by any standards, plainly loves him: their responsiveness to virtually every bar is obvious, with everyone entering fully into the fray, especially in the *Scherzo*.

As an interpretation, not that much has changed since Abbado gave his Vienna performances at the Grosser Saal of the Musikverein in 1993 (issued on CD by DG), save perhaps that the earlier option is marginally more viscerally exciting. Temporarily, things have slowed just a little (around three minutes overall), but that's not to suggest that levels of tension have eased significantly. Abbado keeps the music on the move; textures are full rather than thick and, although fluid, tempi never bend at the mercy of awkward or sticky transitions. It's a classical stance that plays on the music's imposing architecture but bombast (*ampollosità*, as Abbado probably knows it) is I would imagine unused in this man's vocabulary. For the final peroration you hear woodwinds atop the brass (the DG recording is similarly clear), which helps make this most heroic of Bruckner symphonies (the 1878 version, ed Leopold Nowak) a plausible successor to Beethoven's Third. The sound is

excellent, the camerawork sensitive and technically first-rate. Abbado himself is invariably the main focus of attention and he's wonderful to watch: theatrical posing and outsize gestures are evidently foreign to his nature. What you see is clear cueing, a discernible beat and subtle facial responses. The players vary in age and appearance: no stiffening dress-code clamps down with unwarranted formality, just well-dressed men and women totally into the business of making great music. And boy, do they deliver! **Rob Cowan**

Selected comparison:

VPO, Abbado (3/96) (DG) 445 879-2GH

Bruckner

Symphony No 9 (with performing version of the finale by Samale/Phillips/Cohrs/Mazzuca – conclusive revised edition 2012)

Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra / Sir Simon Rattle

EMI (C) 952969-2 (82' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Philharmonie, Berlin,

February 2012



Rattle stakes his claim to a 'complete' Ninth

In an appreciative tribute to the four musicians who put together the 'performing version' of the finale featured on this gloriously played new version of Bruckner's Ninth, Sir Simon Rattle observes that 'there is much more Bruckner here than there is Mozart in the Requiem'. Although this is the 'conclusive revised version by Samale-Phillips-Cohrs-Mazzuca (1983-2012)' it would be unfair not to acknowledge a fine previous recording by Marcus Bosch with the Aachen Symphony Orchestra (Coviello), though at the time that recording was made the edition used hadn't quite reached the 'conclusive' stage. And then there's the latest (2010) revision of the 1981-83 William Carragan performing version that Yoav Talmi recorded with the Oslo Philharmonic for Chandos (3/87); Gerd Schaller and a worthy Philharmonie Festiva have also obliged: Profil, 11/11), not to mention Nikolaus Harnoncourt's Vienna Philharmonic performance of fragments (RCA, 11/03) and many varied options that aren't domestically available. There's little doubt in my mind that, as

presented here, the latest performing version of the finale seems more wholly conclusive than its predecessors, principally because of the way the team responsible deals with the symphony's closing minutes.

Rattle's performance is consistently involving. The vast arches and sudden climate changes in the *Adagio* third movement are particularly well handled, the central build-up towards the prayer-like passage for strings at 15'50" austere inevitable, the desolate wind writing soon afterwards (and the strings' response) utterly disorientating, while the final climactic dissonance, and the route to it, is shattering – though as Rattle points out the *Adagio*'s end sends out signals 'which must be resolved by a huge finale'. But the really interesting aspect of this performance, an aspect that led to an initial sense of disappointment, is that, unless I'm mistaken, the decision on Rattle's part to avoid overstating certain passages in the first movement was made in the light of the finale's balancing function. His overall interpretative policy seems to have been: never too much too soon.

I've now listened to one or other of the 'performing versions' a number of times, and Rattle's sense of conviction is going to make it very difficult for me to return to the three-tier option with a good conscience, even though, from a purely interpretative standpoint, its many historic representatives, from Furtwängler and Walter to Wand, Karajan and Celibidache, offer insights that are unique. The finale as presented here is a true summation, what with its noble chorale, tangled fugue, weathered linking passages and shocking restatements of music from earlier movements.

I can't think of many recent releases that are more musically important than this. If you love Bruckner's Ninth, you have a duty to hear it; and if you don't as yet know it and learn it from Rattle's recording, then you're in a very privileged position. But therein lies a strange paradox. How will you then view recordings of the work without its finale, even the greatest of them? Purely as interesting historic documents? Perhaps. And another thing: how does the 'completed' Bruckner Ninth compare, as an effective performing version, with Cooke's Mahler Tenth? Fully on a par, I'd say.

Rob Cowan

Casella

Concerto for Orchestra, Op 61. *A notte alta*, Op 30^a. Symphonic Fragments from 'La donna serpente', Op 50

©Martin Roscoe *pf*

BBC Philharmonic Orchestra / Gianandrea Noseda
Chandos © CHAN10712 (73' • DDD)



Second disc in Noseda's
BBC Phil Casella series

The music of Alfredo Casella (1883–1947) charts a fascinating stylistic journey. Early in his career he was a bold progressive well and truly under the spell of Mahler (whose Seventh Symphony he arranged for two pianos), Schoenberg and Stravinsky. You can hear all of this in the remarkable *A notte alta* ('In Deepest Night'), originally conceived for solo piano and dating from 1917 (the present reworking for piano and orchestra was fashioned for an American tour four years later). With its deeply personal programme of two lovers clandestinely meeting at night (revealingly, the title-page bears a dedication to Yvonne Müller, a student with whom the composer was having an affair), it's a moody, at times downright sinister soundscape, the dark-hued scoring reminiscent of, say, Roussel's or Bax's Second Symphonies, but more harmonically adventurous than either of those imposing masterworks (Casella himself is not afraid to embrace atonality).

The two purely orchestral offerings are entirely different again. First staged in 1932, Casella's opera based on Carlo Gozzi's dramatic fable *La donna serpente* ('The Serpent Woman') enjoyed only modest success. The composer promptly extracted two hugely colourful series of Symphonic Fragments from the opera. Readers with a fondness for Respighi and Pizzetti will enjoy themselves famously. And, from time to time, I also detected the influence of Busoni's superb 1905 incidental music for Gozzi's *Turandot*. Inspiration runs comparably high in the Concerto for Orchestra that Casella composed in 1937 for the Concertgebouw Orchestra's 50th anniversary and whose idiom now has rather more of a neo-classical flavour (Hindemith's orchestral music from the same decade springs to mind).

Need I add that both performances and sound are absolutely out of the top drawer? Enthusiastically recommended. I look forward to future instalments. **Andrew Achenbach**

Catoire • Sherwood

Catoire Piano Concerto, Op 21

Sherwood Piano Concerto No 2

Hiroaki Takenouchi *pf*

Royal Scottish National Orchestra / Martin Yates

Dutton Epoch © CDLX7287 (67' • DDD)



Yates and Takenouchi revive
Russian and British concertos

The modern rediscovery of Georgy Catoire's modestly proportioned oeuvre was kick-started by Marc-André Hamelin's 1999 Hyperion recital (1/00 – soon to reappear on Helios). Since then the chamber music has been quite well served, leaving just the songs and orchestral works in search of modern champions.

The Piano Concerto was composed in 1906–09, according to most catalogues, though

its first performer, Alexander Goldenweiser, gave 1911 as the date of completion. Dutton do not claim theirs as a first-ever recording; though if Anna Zassimova's lavish documentary study (Berlin, Verlag Ernst Kuhn: 2011) is to be trusted, it would seem to be so. Like all Catoire's instrumental works, the Concerto bears the mark of his close encounters with Tchaikovsky, Taneyev and Scriabin. Accomplished pianist and thoroughly trained composer that he was, the music always falls gratefully on the ear, though in terms of surprise, delight or individuality it lags far behind the likes of, say, César Franck, whose Symphonic Variations loom large behind the 19-minute first movement. Any limitations in the music's effect are surely no fault of Hiroaki Takenouchi, however, who is impeccable in his pianism and unfailing in his idiomatic grasp.

The adventurous spirit of this young Japanese-born, London-based pianist also gives us the Second Concerto (1932–33) of Percy Sherwood (1866–1939), a German-born pianist-teacher-composer who settled in Hampstead at the onset of the First World War and whose manuscripts now reside in the Bodleian Library. This is music still solidly rooted in the 19th-century Germanic tradition, with some imposing Rachmaninovisms grafted on. Never less than accomplished, it is never much more than that either. Once again finely played by Takenouchi, this too is a must-have for anyone interested in the post-history of the Romantic piano concerto. With decent orchestral support and recording, and excellent documentation, it all adds up to a more than welcome issue. **David Fanning**

Debussy

Images. Jeux. Nocturnes³. La mer. Prélude à L'après-midi d'un faune. Marche écossaise sur un thème populaire. Printemps. Two Movements from L'enfant prodigue. Berceuse héroïque

©Women of the Royal Scottish National Orchestra

Chorus; Royal Scottish National Orchestra /

Stéphane Denève

Chandos © 2 CHSA5102 (146' • DDD/DSD)

Debussy

La mer. Prélude à L'après-midi d'un faune. Images

French National Orchestra / Daniele Gatti

Sony Classical © 88697 97400-2 (69' • DDD)



Anniversary composer celebrated by
Denève in Glasgow and Gatti in Paris

As Stéphane Denève bows out as music director of the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, he bequeaths a valuable Gallic legacy to Glasgow. It is natural for a conductor, particularly one of Denève's strong personality, to leave his mark on an orchestra and to bring to it his own

enthusiasms and expertise. During his seven concert seasons in Scotland he has instilled in the RSNO an idiomatic sound and attitude for the French repertoire, as is strikingly evident from this two-CD set of Debussy. All nine works were recorded over short periods in October 2011 and February this year, a factor that, with the orchestra concentrating on Debussy and nothing else, perhaps accounts for the clarity of focus in the style and sensibility of the playing.

This is a Debussy anniversary year, with the usual plethora of discs and performances that such occasions provoke, but this set is an exemplar not only of finesse but also of the vitality and ardour that Debussy's music can harbour and, in the right hands, communicate. In terms of scope, Denève here goes from the early *Printemps* (1887) and the landmark *Prélude à L'après-midi d'un faune* (1894) to the last orchestral work that Debussy wrote, the Diaghilev ballet score *Jeux*, premiered in 1913 but eclipsed in the Parisian consciousness by the furore of Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* only a fortnight later. The discs therefore offer a useful and instructive conspectus of Debussy's orchestral oeuvre and of the way his creativity and ideas developed; but, much more than that, Denève shows how precise were his choices of instrumental colour and how well-defined and animated the images he was expressing through his music. Debussy disliked being dubbed an Impressionist and, when *La mer*, the *Nocturnes* and even the potentially elusive *Jeux* are performed so lucidly and with such underlying passion and élan, it is easy to understand his objections. There is nothing vague about these performances; rather they convey both the dynamism and the delicacy of the music with understanding and stimulating freshness.

Denève covers all three of the works that the Orchestre National de France includes on its new Sony disc – *La mer*, *Prélude à L'après-midi d'un faune* and *Images*. Comparisons are inevitable and, from the point of view of atmosphere, texture and the spectrum of sonority, Denève achieves more subtlety, more of a sense of the music's innate ebb and flow, than does Daniele Gatti. One might automatically think that a French orchestra would have the upper hand in Debussy and these performances are by no means insignificant. It is just that Denève's affinity with Debussy and his ability to inspire the RSNO with his interpretative thoughts conjure up so much more. **Geoffrey Norris**

Dvořák

Symphony No 7, Op 70 B141. Othello, Op 93 B174.

The Wild Dove, Op 110 B198

Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra / Claus Peter Flor
BIS (P) BIS-SACD1896 (73) • DDD/DSD

Dvořák • Elgar

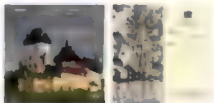
Dvořák Symphony No 7, Op 70 B141^a Elgar

Variations on an Original Theme, 'Enigma', Op 36^b

London Symphony Orchestra / Pierre Monteux

Eloquence (P) 480 5019 (67) • ADD

Recorded 1958, 1959



Half a century separates British and Malaysian Dvořák Seventh Symphonies

The art of Claus Peter Flor appears to have matured greatly with the passing of time. I can recall interviewing him many years ago when he confessed to special admiration for Rafael Kubelík; and, while Flor's way with Dvořák's Seventh Symphony is quite unlike Kubelík's in specific detail, its implication of mood and climate is quite similar. The opening is slow and full of foreboding, the ensuing arguments flexible and lyrically stated though rarely exaggerated. You have a definite sense of a charted terrain, a varied journey keenly observed, with subtle shifts of pace as the scenery changes: the emphatic central climax becomes a real event, as does the closing climax of the *Poco adagio* second movement. Flor achieves a pleasing lift at the start of the *Scherzo* and I like the way the Trio floats into earshot. The finale is powerful, the second subject without the swaggering *ritardando* favoured by both Kubelík and another strong rival, Nikolaus Harnoncourt (who also affects a rather effete, excessively *legato Scherzo*). I sensed even greater dramatic thrust in the two fill-ups, especially *Othello*, which is given a cracking performance (and a recording to match), whereas I'd say that in *The Wild Dove* Flor and Harnoncourt are on a more or less equal footing, though Harnoncourt's Royal Concertgebouw is the more seasoned instrument.

Decca's well-transferred Pierre Monteux reissue is typical in its musical intelligence and attention to inner detail, though I was surprised that in Monteux's hands the last moments of the *Scherzo*'s Trio sounds just a little stiff and awkward, the last thing you expect from him. The *Poco adagio* has rarely sounded more Brahmsian and although having divided violin desks is as ever a boon, their antiphonal effect is less vivid than on the BIS recording. Harnoncourt also favours separated violins.

Monteux's fill-up is a vivid performance of Elgar's *Enigma* Variations that many consider to be the best ever recorded, and with good reason: just try either the hushed start of 'Nimrod' or the thrilling last variation. Both are truly exceptional. As to the Dvořák Symphony, I still enjoy Serebrier's earthy account for Warner, though Flor's fill-ups are better; Harnoncourt is typically imaginative, Kubelík passionate in a way that was unique to him and

Flor, a strong presence, well worth considering for both technical and musical reasons. As I say, *Othello* in particular is superb and the Malaysian Philharmonic play brilliantly throughout.

Rob Cowan

Sym No 7 – selected comparisons:

BPO, Kubelík (10/71^a) (DG) 477 9764GM2

Bournemouth SO, Serebrier (5/12) (WARN) 2564 66656-2

Sym No 7, Wild Dove – selected comparison:

Harnoncourt (12/98^a) (WARN) 2564 61530-2

Garreta

Les illes Medes. Impressions simfòniques

Orquestra Simfònica de Barcelona i Nacional de

Catalunya / Miquel Ortega

Tritó (P) TD0086 (60) • DDD



Ortega and his Catalans champion a native composer

The reviews editor, sending me this CD for comment, personally found Julio Garreta's music 'pretty enchanting'. I do too, and also remarkably individual, delicately easy on the ear and unexpectedly 'un-Spanish' – in a folksy sense – for a Catalan composer who lived as recently as 1875–1925.

The *Impressions simfòniques* for string orchestra was written first, an early work (but by no means immature) which was not performed until 1907. Its four movements have something in common with the Tchaikovsky Serenade (although its melodies and harmonies are less ripe). It is structurally traditional, full of individuality, has a gentle, poignant cello solo at the centre of its slow movement (affectionately played here by Nabí Cabestany) but, instead of a waltz, provides a jolly, rhythmic, almost neo-classical *Temps moderat* third movement. The finale is certainly increasingly *De pressa i apassionat*.

Les illes Medes is a mature work, a long time in gestation (because of various interruptions in Garreta's life) but was finally premiered in 1922, conducted by Pau Casals. It is a personal recollection of a visit the composer made to the beautiful coast of the Medes Islands, opening epically, then creating an idyllic evocation with bird calls from the woodwind. But the sea is ever-present; the simple, dominating main theme is soon given to the horns, and it is the horns and woodwind that provide the magical closing section. This a sea vista of a high order, which becomes more haunting as it becomes really familiar, and this beautifully played and recorded disc is increasingly rewarding. **Ivan March**

Grieg

String Quartet No 1, Op 27 (arr Tognetti). Two

Elegiac Melodies, Op 34, Erotikk, Op 43 No 5

(arr Tognetti). Holberg Suite, Op 40

Australian Chamber Orchestra / Richard Tognetti v71

BIS (P) BIS-SACD1877 (64) • DDD/DSD



New partnership: JoAnn Falletta addresses the audience at the Ulster Hall, Belfast



Tognetti and his distinctive approach in Grieg for strings

The Australian Chamber Orchestra is renowned for its crisp, clean playing, superb ensemble and intonation, and vivacious style. The partnership with lead violin Richard Tognetti has yielded some impressive results and, following their two-disc survey of Mozart's violin concertos (2/11, A/11), orchestra and conductor have looked still further north, to Grieg. Their programme mixes original compositions for string orchestra with two artful transcriptions by Tognetti himself.

It is fascinating to hear Grieg's quite hefty G minor String Quartet of 1878 played by small orchestral forces (the ACO are 17 in number), especially set alongside *From Holberg's Time* (1884), more usually played by fuller string ensembles. As Malcolm MacDonald notes in the booklet, Grieg's writing for the original instruments transfers well to the weightier medium, for instance in the vibrant *Scherzo*, the music less conversational in manner than many late-Romantic quartets. And yet the result does not strike me as a symphony for strings, retaining something of the intimacy of its source.

Tognetti's other arrangement is of the famous (and possibly misleadingly named) 'Erotikk', from the *Lyric Pieces*, Book 3. The treatment of Grieg's piano piece (love, rather

than eroticism, is its subject: Grieg was no Scriabin!) is a little over-ripe, leaving less to the imagination than it deserves. No quibbles about the execution, though, of this or any of its companion pieces. The enchanting *Elegiac Melodies* are beautifully done, as is *Holberg*, which dances and entrances in equal measure. Both latter works have dozens of rivals but, while one might find equally fine renditions, I doubt there are many better ones. Excellent sound, as usual from this label.

Guy Rickards

Holst

Overture, 'Walt Whitman', Op 7 H42. Symphony, 'The Cotswolds', Op 8 H47. A Winter Idyll, H31. Japanese Suite, Op 33 H126. Indra, Op 13 H66

Ulster Orchestra / JoAnn Falletta

Naxos © 8 572914 (66' • DDD)



Falletta's first recording as Ulster Orchestra boss

The early orchestral works on this recording – the *Winter Idyll* (1897), *Walt Whitman* Overture (1899) and *Cotswolds* Symphony (1899–1900) – remind us of the substantial period Holst, like his confrère student and composer Vaughan Williams, took to develop his distinctive voice. Although Wagner is often cited as the most prominent influence on Holst as he emerged from the Royal College of Music at the turn of the century, Dvořák is much more evident in the youthful *Winter*

Idyll and elements of the Czech's Sixth Symphony seem to leap off the page of the *Whitman* Overture. As for the more ambitious *Cotswolds* Symphony, there are more signs of Holst's later colourful orchestral technique in the energetic *Scherzo*, though the other movements, not least the 'Elegy (In memoriam William Morris)' – perhaps the composer's most overt expression of his socialist allegiances – still powerfully betray their 19th-century roots.

Nevertheless, it is good to hear these works played with such panache by the Ulster Orchestra under their new principal conductor, JoAnn Falletta, who gives the *Cotswolds* Symphony a more vigorous outing than does Douglas Bostock with the Munich SO. The slightly later symphonic poem *Indra*, Op 13 (1903), though still stylistically inchoate, reveals a major step forwards in terms of the exotic material used to reflect the subject of the Indian legend. Even more exotic, however, is the much more characteristic *Japanese Suite*, Op 33 (1916), a fascinating precursor to *The Planets*. Infused with techniques and sounds that arose from sounds he drew from hearing Stravinsky for the first time, the work is beautifully performed here, most notably the delicate, crystalline sounds of celesta, harp, woodwind and horn.

Jeremy Dibble

Cotswolds Sym – selected comparison:

Munich SO, Bostock (CICO) CLASCD284

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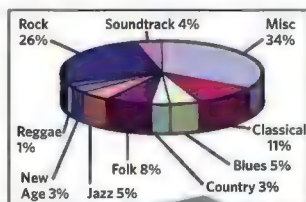
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Janáček

Taras Bulba. Lachian Dances. Moravian Dances
Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra / Antoni Wit
Naxos © 8 572695 (55' • DDD)



Wit follows Glagolitic Mass with early nationalistic Janáček

With his Pan-Slav ideal for Czech lands to be integrated into an entity presided over by the Russians, Janáček would surely have taken pleasure in this pan-Slav record. Here we have Lachian and Moravian dances coupled with a work celebrating the belligerent exploits of Ukrainian Cossacks and their leader against the Poles, all played with evident exhilaration by a Polish conductor and orchestra. *Taras Bulba* of 1915 was, Janáček told a friend in 1918, his 'musical testament', even if he had by then somewhat revised his views about the Russians. It remains none the less a vigorous, original set of portraits of three heroic deaths, those of Taras's two sons and his own death. Janáček does not make matters easy for his performers, with some unusual instructions and difficult balance, nor for the recording engineers, who only occasionally find details eluding them. The sound in general is warm and vivid, and Antoni Wit has a sure hand with all Janáček's demands.

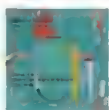
The six *Lachian Dances* (1924) are a selection from an earlier set of *Valachian Dances* (1889–91), music from neighbouring regions, and are vivid arrangements for full orchestra; the six *Moravian Dances* (not Janáček's title) are a group taken from the ballet *Rákoš Rákoczy* by his publisher. Though they are early pieces, composed before the revelation of *Jenůfa*, they have much to indicate the direction Janáček's thoughts were taking with the folk music of his native region. Fascinating to hear as versions of material that was feeding into his mature idiom, they are in their own right colourful and highly enjoyable pieces, relished here by the Polish players. **John Warrack**

Martinů

Violin Concerto No 2, H293^a. Symphony No 1, H289

^aLorenzo Gatto *vi*

National Orchestra of Belgium / Walter Weller
Fuga Libera © FUG589 (67' • DDD)



Weller's Belgian Martinů cycle continues

CD competition in Martinů's Second Violin Concerto includes an especially fine version by Isabelle Faust with the Prague Philharmonia under Jiří Bělohlávek but Lorenzo Gatto (who is still only in his twenties) has no need to fear the heat of rivalry. His warmly communicative playing style perfectly suits a work that was written for one of the last century's most

tonally alluring violinists, Mischa Elman. In his booklet-note Harry Halbrecht claims that the Concerto, a wartime piece, 'does not attempt the monumental scale of the concertos of Beethoven, Brahms or Bartók (No 2)', which is only really true beyond the 13-minute first movement, which achieves great weight of utterance and in terms of gravitas is surely up there with Martinů's finest symphonies. Walter Weller has a natural feel of the swaying gait of Martinů's individual rhythmic language and his conducting, allied to fine orchestral playing and exceptionally good sound, certainly makes an impact.

Bělohlávek is once again a principal recent rival in the First Symphony, another wartime work, his recording part of a first-rate complete symphony cycle with the BBC Symphony Orchestra. As heard here, the National Orchestra of Belgium delivers plenty in the way of tonal weight (try the wonderful *Largo* third movement) and while both performances tell it as it is, I'd say that Bělohlávek's version offers marginally more clarity and, at times, more tension. But it's a close-run thing: for example, both conductors bring a healthy 'kick' to the *Scherzo*. I'd be happy with either, and was especially impressed by Gatto's brilliant and tender-hearted playing of the Violin Concerto.

Rob Cowan

Vn Conc No 2 – selected comparison:

Faust, Prague Philb, Bělohlávek

(8/08) (HARM) HMC90 1951

Sym No 1 – selected comparison:

BBC SO, Bělohlávek (10/11) (ONYX) ONYX4061

A Merikanto

Symphonies – No 1, Op 5; No 3

Turku Philharmonic Orchestra / Petri Sakari

Alba © ABCD336 (70' • DDD/DSD)



Symphonies from Merikanto the younger

Aarre Merikanto (1893–1958) was a natural-born symphonist, yet his output in that genre is less extensive than it should be. His First, recorded here for the first time, was composed twice over (once while a Reger student and again after orchestration lessons with Vasilenko), reached its final form in 1916, and is a garrulous, structurally ramshackle work, a tapestry of influences delightfully orchestrated with the emphasis on the atmospheric rather than the symphonic. The overlong third movement, *Andante con moto*, at over 17' is as long as the first two spans combined and, with the 12' finale, somewhat overbalances the whole. And yet I find myself drawn deeper into its lush, late-Romantic idiom with every hearing.

The Third (1952–53; not to be confused with the impressive single-span Fantasia of 1923 recorded by Finlandia in the 1980s – nla) is in

its way just as unusual but more satisfying a design, opening with a *scherzo* and succeeded by a lovely slow movement and vibrant finale all in proportion. The Third sounds like a relaxation work, like Brahms's Second or Honegger's Fourth, coming after a Herculean struggle elsewhere, but is beguiling on its terms. The Turku Philharmonic Orchestra give superbly articulated performances of both works and Sakari clearly has the measure of Merikanto's symphonism. Alba's sound is recorded at rather a low level, so turn the volume up a notch or two more than normal. No 2, a *War Symphony* almost 30 years before Englund's, is being recorded later this year and is keenly anticipated. **Guy Rickards**

Poulenc - Saint-Saëns

Poulenc Organ Concerto

Saint-Saëns Symphony No 3, 'Organ'

Thomas Trotter *org*

Auckland Philharmonic Orchestra / Arvo Volmer

Atoll © ACD116 (58' • DDD)

Recorded live at Auckland Town Hall, March 2010



Trotter on the North Island for organ-orchestra greats

Auckland Town Hall is one of those lucky venues that has a vigorous organ of its own (an Orgelbau Klais Opus 1860 of 1910, based on an earlier Norman & Beard) rather than having to link up remotely with some cathedral or other when it wants to record Saint-Saëns's Third Symphony. This latter option can work well, as we know from leading CDs by Mariss Jansons and the Oslo Philharmonic with Wayne Marshall on the organ of Rouen's Eglise de Saint-Ouen (EMI) or Daniel Barenboim with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, teamed up with Gaston Litaize in Chartres Cathedral (DG). But this disc by the Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra capitalises on the hall's good fortune by featuring Thomas Trotter in live performances both of the Saint-Saëns and of Poulenc's Concerto for Organ, Strings and Timpani. The timpanist (unnamed) contributes properly emphatic punctuations, and Trotter is as one with the orchestra in mixing the music's dynamism with succulent bitterness and in illuminating the colours and shadings of Poulenc's instrumentation.

Arvo Volmer's natural control of rhythm and pace makes an equally positive impact in the Saint-Saëns symphony, finding the delicate balance between classicism and romanticism that characterises the music's temperament. There is, after all, quite a lot of symphony before the organ really lets rip in the *Maestoso* finale, and Volmer conducts the whole score judiciously and affectionately. He generates the excitement of expectation in the *Allegro* and, with all the stops pulled out, the peroration is as powerful as could be. **Geoffrey Norris**



Auckland upbeat: Arvo Volmer conducts the Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra at the city's Town Hall (see previous page)

Prokofiev

Symphony No 5, Op 100. The Year 1941, Op 90

São Paulo Symphony Orchestra / Marin Alsop

Naxos © 8 573029 (60' • DDD)



Alsop begins São Paulo Prokofiev cycle with the Fifth

I'm not sure we needed a recording of Prokofiev's symphonic suite *The Year 1941* but, as an up-beat to a brand-new cycle of the symphonies with Marin Alsop's brand-new orchestra, the São Paulo Symphony, it's a collector's item which at least 'bigs up' the impact of the masterpiece it prefaces.

As a response to the Soviet Union's Great Patriotic War against Nazi invaders, you can understand why it was greeted with less than qualified rapture by the powers that be. 'In the Struggle' is little more than an offcut from the *Romeo and Juliet* fight sequences, delivered, it has to be said, with gusto by Alsop's Brazilians, and what follows is so infected by Prokofiev's sweetly parodistic manner that the momentous events of that year couldn't be further from one's mind. There's a big tune 'For the Brotherhood of Man' but it's strictly 'end title' stuff of the celluloid variety, and 'the grandeur of the human spirit' promised and

delivered in the Fifth Symphony's first movement is hardly anticipated.

Disciples of Leonard Bernstein (for whom the Fifth was a regular calling card) all do well by this piece – none more so than Michael Tilson Thomas in a thrilling performance with the London Symphony Orchestra on Sony. Alsop's account is not of that sonic splendour but it does have the measure of the piece, not least the epic first movement, its myriad fluctuations of pulse confidently worked into an imposing whole. A searing first trumpet and ripe descanting horns add to its impressiveness. The recording engineers go for depth and breadth – the widescreen approach – which those, like me, with a taste for more immediacy might find too homogenised.

Americans always 'get' the *Scherzo*, with its affluent Cadillac of a Trio gliding through a newly adopted neighbourhood, and I like Alsop's slow movement, its shot-silk texturing tempering ecstasy with (at the climax) a touch of agony. But maybe it's about going the extra distance, temperamentally speaking, which ultimately separates a very good performance from a great one. Alsop is firmly in the former category but somewhat short of the latter.

Edward Seckerson

Sym No 5 – selected comparison:

LSO, Tilson Thomas (3/93) (SONY) SMK48239

Reiner

Cello Concerto, Op 34^a. Sonata brevis, Op 39^b.

Elegy and Capriccio^b. Verses^b

Sebastian Foron *vc*^b Matti Raekallio *pf*

^aCzech Philharmonic Orchestra / Zdeněk Mácal

Toccata Classics © TOCCO083 (72' • DDD/DSD)



Orchestral and piano works by Bohemian silenced under Nazis

Born in Žatec, Bohemia, Karel Reiner (1910–79) was the son of a cantor and graduated with distinction in both music and law. After studying under Suk at the Prague Conservatory, he became a follower of the modernist Alois Hába (1893–1973), famous for his assiduous embrace of microtonality. Reiner, too, composed a number of works in the quarter- and sixth-tone system, and his pre-war output includes the *Five Jazz Studies* for piano as well as a Suite for large orchestra.

The earliest offering on this enterprising CD comprises the large-scale Cello Concerto that Reiner completed in 1943, shortly before his transportation by the Nazis to the ghetto at Terezín (where fellow inmates numbered Haas, Krása, Klein, Ullman and the conductor Karel Ančerl). It's a gritty, uncompromising statement, whose deeply felt centrepiece

(marked *Cantabile ed espressivo*) acts as an effective foil to the bustling outer movements. Reiner somehow survived numerous horrors, not least internment at Auschwitz and the slave-labour camp of Freiberg near Dresden. Upon his return to Prague in 1946, he wrote the *Sonata brevis* for cello and piano – the imploring *Marcia funebre* at its heart all the more powerfully unnerving when one recalls that its typhus-afflicted creator had only recently endured a death march to the Tegernsee in Bavaria. Next comes the *Elegy* and *Capriccio*, a thematically linked diptych from 1957–60 boasting a lyrical ardour and rhythmic ebullience that serve to remind the listener of the composer's Slavonic roots. The pithy and often witty *Verses* appeared in 1975, by which time Reiner had already decided to hand back his Party card in a final gesture of defiance which ensured that he would never again hear any of his works played in public.

Performances throughout have heaps of spirit and do ample justice to the sparkly inventive music of this forgotten figure. Collectors with a taste for adventure should definitely lend an ear. **Andrew Achenbach**

Shostakovich

Symphony No 11, 'The Year 1905', Op 103

Monte Carlo Philharmonic Orchestra /

Yakov Kreizberg

OPMC Classics © OPMC005 (60' • DDD)



More from the Monte Carlo Kreizberg archive

I had hoped that this might prove the perfect recording with which to remember the late, lamented Yakov Kreizberg – I heard him on a couple of occasions give really electrifying live performances of this marvellous piece. He and his half-brother Semyon Bychkov have both held a deep attachment to it, as have I. In some ways it is the most personal of all the Shostakovich symphonies and perhaps the biggest regret here is that the Orchestre Philharmonique de Monte-Carlo never quite transcend the dots on the page, with a degree of circumspection always standing between us and the raw emotionalism, to say nothing of the visceral excitement, of the piece.

One feels that most pointedly in the great eleventh-hour oration of the cor anglais in the finale, where the most pertinent of all the revolutionary songs – 'Bare your heads!' – puts aside defiance and quietly mourns the fallen. But so squarely is it phrased here that, far from portending liberation to come, the bar-lines seem to imprison it. And it isn't just individuals, it's the collective fervour of the playing that falls short. The eerie calm of the 'Palace Square' is atmospherically evoked, with chilling dissonances in the slow-moving chords registering by stealth. But punches are pulled in

the really emotive climaxes with, for instance, the solo onslaught of the percussion battery in the 'Ninth of January' massacre almost apologetic for its brutal intrusion and the trenchant goose-stepping in the finale immaculate as opposed to menacing.

There can be no doubting Kreizberg's grasp of this piece – its storm, stress, sweep and ideology. Those revolutionary songs carry a heavy burden and he shares it. But ultimately it's the difference here between a satisfactory soundtrack to these momentous events and something which truly and overwhelmingly conveys what they meant to those, like Shostakovich, whose lives were impacted by them. But, like the bells at the close of *The Year 1905* (too muted here by half), Kreizberg's memory will resonate on. **Edward Seckerson**

Shostakovich

Violin Concertos – No 1, Op 77; No 2, Op 129

Sayaka Shoji *violin*

Ural Philharmonic Orchestra / Dmitri Liss

Mirare © MIR166 (68' • DDD)



Both concertos from the 1999 Paganini Competition laureate

Sayaka Shoji has excellent credentials as a player of these concertos. The *cantabile* lines that play an important role in both works benefit from her refined style and ability to retain interest with small but effective expressive nuances. Her playing is often restrained, yet she embraces wholeheartedly the passionate outbursts, as when the violin takes over the Passacaglia theme in the First Concerto (tr 3, 5'21"). The three cadenzas are superbly paced, that in the First Concerto building tension inexorably, the meditative one in the Second Concerto's first movement a model of beautiful *legato* double-stopping. And in the fast, spiky movements, she appears as a true virtuoso – full of life and energy, and apparently able to perform the most demanding passages without having to be careful.

The orchestra plays with precision and commitment, and the recorded sound is big and spacious, evoking power and mystery. Yet there are places where I wished for clearer definition in the bass or in the important horn parts. I'm also reminded that David Oistrakh, dedicatee of these concertos, played them quite differently. In the Second Concerto's opening movement he frequently moves the music on, ignoring the composer's metronome marks and adding his own dynamic inflections. The result is more engaging; sorrowful, but not as cold and bleak. And the concerto's finale has a harsh, desperate excitement lacking here. But I still salute Shoji's brilliant, thoughtful interpretations.

Duncan Druce

Vn Conc No 2 – selected comparison:

Oistrakh, LSO, Ormandy (BBCL) BBCL4267-2

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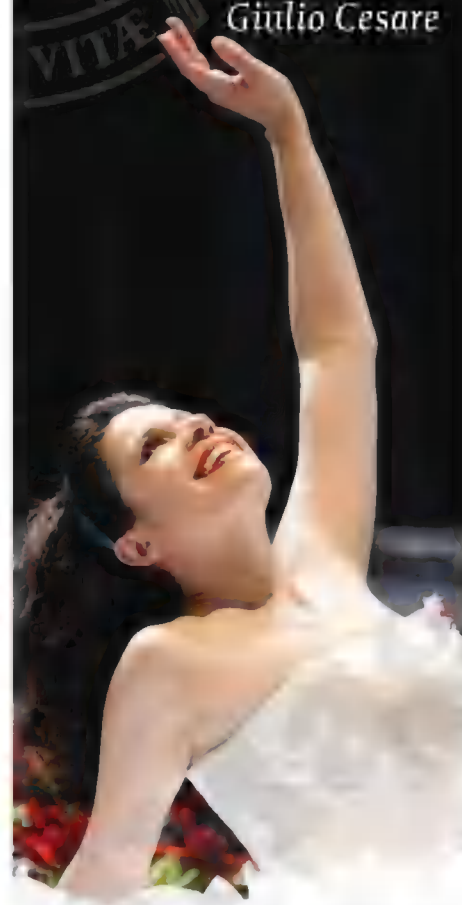
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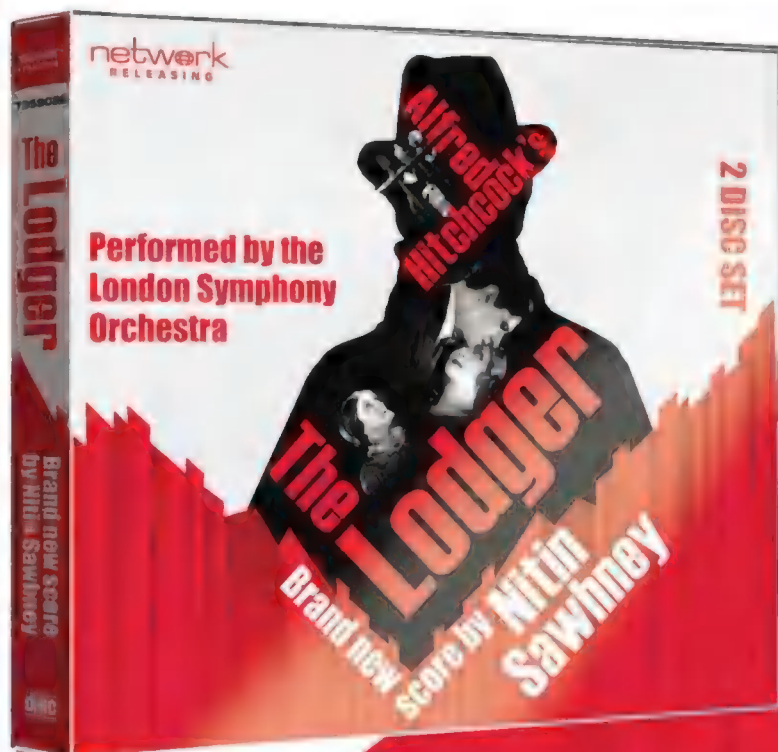


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Vivaldi

12 Violin Concertos, 'La cetra', Op 9

Holland Baroque Society / Rachel Podger *violin*

Channel Classics (C) (2) (D) CCSSA33412

(117' • DDD/DSD)



Podger in Holland for the 1727 'La cetra' set

La cetra ('The Lyre') was published in Amsterdam in 1727, dedicated to the Austrian emperor, Charles VI. (Confusingly, another manuscript set of 12 concertos, from the following year and likewise dedicated to Charles, are also called *La cetra*.) The familiar ingredients of Vivaldi's concerto style are well established by this stage in his career; there are perhaps two or three concertos where the elements are put together in a rather superficial way but the set as a whole demonstrates Vivaldi's remarkable ability to find continually renewed inspiration in writing for solo violin with string orchestra. (Just one work, No 9 in B flat, a spirited, airy double violin concerto, changes the setting.) My particular favourites are No 3, with its elaborate orchestral *tutti*s in the outer movements, No 5, which has an unusual, tempestuous character, the serious-minded No 8, with its elaborate, sonorous writing for strings, and, perhaps best of all, the last concerto in B minor. One of two in which the solo violin plays *scordatura* (with non-standard tuning), it's notable for its attractive melody and continual inventiveness.

A few years ago I was impressed, listening to the Holland Baroque Society's disc of music by Georg Muffat, directed by Matthew Halls (A/08), by their youthful verve. With Rachel Podger in charge, their enthusiasm is undimmed, and there's a wholehearted commitment to projecting the character of each movement and to articulating the shape of every phrase. Even what might seem to be mundane accompaniment figures have an expressive nuance that gives positive support of the solo line. Podger plays with her customary beauty of tone, purity of tuning and lively variety of articulation. Her melodic decorations in the slow central movements give a delightfully unforced, spontaneous impression.

The performances take a few liberties. I love the way that at the start of the First Concerto, the repeated chord pattern is extended backwards, providing a sort of 'young person's guide to the basso continuo', as organ, harpsichord, double bass and guitar enter one by one. And Podger's elaboration of the chordal introduction to the Fifth Concerto immediately establishes the work's dramatic character. I'm not so sure about what sounds like a mandolin obbligato in the *Largo* of the Second Concerto (or is it just harpsichord?). It's a delightful sound but draws attention away from the violin

melody. Still, these are brilliant, energetic performances, full of genuine Vivaldian spirit and excitement. **Duncan Druce**

Weinberg

Rhapsody on Moldavian Themes, Op 47 No 1.

Symphony No 6, Op79^a

^aGlinka Choral College Boys' Choir; St Petersburg

State Symphony Orchestra / Vladimir Lande

Naxos (S) 8 572779 (61' • DDD)



Weinberg's 'starting point' symphony from St Petersburg

Word is beginning to get around that Weinberg's Sixth should be on the shortlist for anyone wondering where to make a start with his massive symphonic output. It was composed a matter of months after Shostakovich's Thirteenth; and, though it may not quite match the lacerating quality of that masterpiece, there are all sorts of ways in which it makes a fine complement. Shostakovich recommended the piece to his pupils and together the two works spearheaded a revival of the cantata-symphony that found the Soviet Union in the lead.

Weinberg entrusted three of his five movements to boys' voices (he may well have heard from Shostakovich about their symbolism of damaged innocence in the works of Britten). The boys of Glinka Choral College carry the responsibility well here, showing up the limitations of the brave but non-native Russian singing on Fedoseyev's Neos disc and of the adult female voices for Ahronovich (singing in Yiddish in an excellently played but artificially recorded account). Lande conducts with an understanding and fervour that is greatly superior to both Fedoseyev versions (especially that on Relief, which is brutally cut and to be avoided). There is no getting away from the superiority of Kondrashin's interpretation or the playing of his top-notch Moscow orchestra, who give Weinberg the kind of cutting edge evident in the composer's own recordings as pianist. But this is not easy to find, so Naxos should be thanked for giving us this worthwhile stop-gap. If it heralds recordings of Weinberg's later, as yet unrecorded, vocal symphonies, that will certainly be cause for hats in the air.

Similarly, the *Moldavian Rhapsody*, which shows Weinberg at his most tuneful and engaging, cannot compare to the rival Chandos account but it does enhance the attractiveness of the disc for newcomers seeking inexpensive access to his orchestral music. **David Fanning**

Rhapsody – selected comparison:

National Polish Radio SO, Chmura

(11/04) (CHAN) CHAN10237

Symphony – selected comparisons:

Jerusalem SO, Ahronovich (JERU) SCD8005

Tchaikovsky SO of Moscow Rad, Fedoseyev (RELI) CR991095

Vienna SO, Fedoseyev (NEOS) NEOS11125

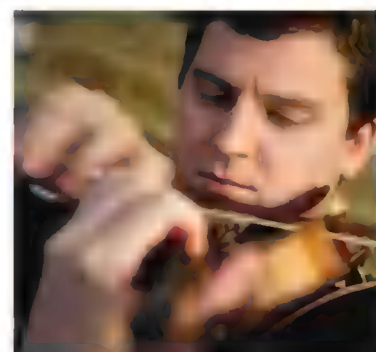
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IN THE STUDIO

An inside view of who's before the mics and what they're recording

• Ehnes busy for Chandos

June saw violinist James Ehnes (pictured) and pianist Andrew Armstrong head to Potton Hall in Suffolk to record the second volume in their Bartók sonata series for Chandos. Their 'beautifully executed' previous volume was reviewed in the March issue, and Ehnes' performance of the same composer's violin and viola concertos was Recording of the Month last November. Ehnes then travelled to Bergen to play the solo violin parts of Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake*, also for the Chandos microphones.



• Faust in Stockholm

Sticking with Bartók – and indeed former Recording of the Month artists – Isabelle Faust has been in Stockholm recording the composer's two violin concertos with the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra and its music director Daniel Harding. Harmonia Mundi will release the resulting recordings in 2014.

• Sibelius North and South

In the week this issue of *Gramophone* went to press, the BBC Philharmonic began recording a Sibelius symphony cycle at its new home in Salford – under the baton of principal guest conductor John Storgårds and the watchful eyes and careful ears of producers Mike George and Brian Pidgeon. Storgårds will conduct the Third and Sixth Symphonies with the BBC Philharmonic at the Proms on 9 August.

• Dvořák in Bournemouth

And finally, from the twittersphere... Producer Phil Rowlands tweeted his thanks to the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra on 17 May following a 'productive couple of days' recording the Third and Sixth Symphonies by Dvořák under José Serebrier. Rowlands followed-up ten days later having completed the editing of the recordings that 'fare' sounding great...just 1, 2, 4, 5 and 8 to go.' Watch out for the releases on Warner Classics.



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Wiklund

'The Romantic Piano Concerto, Vol 57'

Piano Concertos - No 1, Op 10; No 2, Op 17.

Konsertstycke, Op 1

Martin Sturfält *pf*

Helsingborg Symphony Orchestra / Andrew Manze

Hyperion Ⓢ CDA67828 (75' • DDD)



Concertos by former Swedish Royal Orchestra conductor

The Swedish composer Adolf Wiklund does not make it into every reference work and, unless you are a student of Scandinavian music, the chances are that, like me, you will not have come across him before. His dates, 1879-1950, might suggest that stylistically he had something in common with Prokofiev, say, Bartók or Stravinsky. But no. Wiklund is, by and large, joyfully unaffected by 20th-century musical trends, not dissimilar in a way to his near contemporary Sergei Bortkiewicz (1877-1952). The obvious debts to Liszt, Tchaikovsky and Grieg (an early measure in Wiklund's E minor Concerto comes straight out of the Norwegian's A minor Concerto), the glimpses of Brahms, echoes of Marx's *Romantic* Concerto and the resourceful orchestration coloured by Wiklund's admiration for Wagner and Sibelius cohere into a likeable but oddly indistinctive voice.

Wiklund's single-movement *Konsertstycke* is the earliest work here (1902). By a strange coincidence, another new recording of this obscurity surfaced recently on Sterling, coupled with two other single-movement works by Ludvig Norman and Ture Rangström in fine performances by Maria Verbaite and the NorrlandsOperan Symphony Orchestra under B Tommy Andersson. Hyperion, though, has the edge. If there is a certain coolness about some of their concerto releases, this is not one of them. Wiklund's compatriot Martin Sturfält (who also contributes an excellent booklet-note) plays all three works with magnificent aplomb, his energy and palpable enthusiasm matched by Andrew Manze and his players. There is nothing of the studio here, and the recording venue, the Helsingborg Concert Hall, not normally noted for its generous acoustic, lends a warm, resonant glow to proceedings. **Jeremy Nicholas**

Konsertstycke - selected comparison:

Verbaite, NorrlandsOperan Orch, Andersson

(STER) CDS1095-2

'British Flute Concertos'

Alwyn Flute Concerto (orch McCabe) **L Berkeley**

Flute Concerto, Op 36 **Dove** *The Magic Flute*

Dances **Poulenc** Flute Sonata (orch L Berkeley)

Emily Beynon *fl*

BBC National Orchestra of Wales / Bramwell Tovey

Chandos Ⓢ CHAN10718 (78' • DDD)



Emily Beynon, Bramwell Tovey and the BBC NOW at Hoddinott Hall, Cardiff



The Concertgebouw Orchestra principal flute tapes concertos

The flute and its predecessor, the recorder, have both attracted composers to write bravura concertos since the beginning of musical history, usually designed also to divert the listener. Jonathan Dove's *The Magic Flute Dances* continues that tradition, with his scintillating scoring, while his entertaining pastiche ingeniously draws in themes from Mozart's opera, not intended for the flute.

French musicians, in particular, have a natural feeling for the instrument, not least Francis Poulenc who, in his Sonata, with its touch of gentle melancholy in the first movement, a haunting central 'Cantilena' and an engaging *giocoso* finale, has been so perceptively and elegantly orchestrated by Lennox Berkeley. His own Concerto, more serious in feeling, especially the eloquent *Adagio*, is one of the finest works in the flautist's repertoire. William Alwyn's Concerto vigorously, and also tenderly, makes the most of the interplay between flute and the other wind instruments in the original version, especially in the central movements, and this is not lost in John McCabe's transcription. With virtuosity and rich feeling for the music's changing colours, Emily Beynon makes a memorable soloist; and, with Bramwell Tovey's excellent accompaniments, all these works spring readily to life in Chandos's vividly realistic and splendidly balanced recording. **Ivan March**

'Neapolitan Cello Concertos'

Florenza Cello Concerto. Sinfonia

Leo Cello Concerto **Majo** Cello Concerto

Sollima *Fecit Neap 17*

Giovanni Sollima *vc* I Turchini / Antonio Florio

Glossa Ⓢ GCD922604 (72' • DDD)



Baroque concertos and the distinctive voice of Sollima

In 2010 we had Neapolitan flute concertos from Auser Musici (Hyperion, 4/10), and very nice they were too. Now here are five Neapolitan cello concertos from a group which has already done much to alert us to the lost riches of one of the great powerhouses of 18th-century music. And it turns out that the cello was indeed a popular instrument there, championed by some formidable-sounding virtuosos, even if none of those is on this disc. The concertos themselves are not, in truth, as immediately appealing as the ones for flute. Leo's is smooth and moodily operatic by turns, as befits his principal line of work; there is a warmly *galant* piece with a soulful central slow movement by Giuseppe de Majo and a gracefully turned example by Nicola Fiorenza; but in general this light, lean and pleasingly melodious music, consisting either of long, expressive tunes or assertively clipped short phrases (think Pergolesi, even if via *Pulcinella*) seems unlikely to haunt the memory for long.

Fiorenza also contributes a more contrapuntally formal Sinfonia for four violins and bass but the real odd piece out here is *Fecit Neap 17*, a concerto composed in 2011 by the disc's soloist, Giovanni Sollima, which atmospherically and imaginatively mixes Neapolitan stylings with hints of orientalism, East European folk and eerie creakings. Ultimately, though, its single 19-minute movement challenges the attention-span.

Sollima's playing is strongly expressive and lyrical, with plenty of tastefully applied vibrato. The string orchestra is perhaps too small to offer a truly satisfying depth of tone, though the use of a harp where a theorbo might have been adds tangy definition. **Lindsay Kemp**

Chamber



Caroline Gill reviews Schubert from the Wihan Quartet:
'There is very little of the manic oscillation between the joy and despair Schubert must have been feeling' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 61**



Philip Clark on New York's specialist new music quartet:
'They play with a beautifully choreographed physicality that's punch-drunk on its own vitality' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 61**

Arensky • Borodin • Glazunov

Arensky String Quartet No 2, Op 35 **Borodin** String Sextet **Glazunov** String Quintet, Op 39

Nash Ensemble

Onyx ® ONYX4067 (66' • DDD)



Nash with myriad-configured chamber works from Russia

Borodin got in ahead of his critics by admitting candidly that his String Sextet was 'very Mendelssohnian', excusing himself on the grounds that it was 'written to please the Germans', not something Russian composers are usually in a hurry to do. It is in fact a most attractively written piece, Mendelssohnian indeed in the fleet-footed opening *Allegro* but with a particular melodic elegance, in the closing *Andante* as well as in this *Allegro*, and a quick-wittedness that are entirely his own.

There are also touches of Tchaikovsky, whose memory is wholeheartedly saluted in Arensky's work, a string quartet for the unusual combination of violin, viola and two cellos. It is also unusually organised to include allusions to Tchaikovsky's Third String Quartet (itself an elegiac work for his violinist friend Ferdinand Laub), a skilfully worked set of variations on Tchaikovsky's song known in English as 'Christ had a garden', a chant from the Orthodox Requiem, and the popular folk melody 'Slava bogu', which turns up in *Boris Godunov* and Beethoven's Second 'Rasumovsky' Quartet. If this all sounds something of a shambles, it is held together by Arensky's fluency and charm, not to mention his skilful ear (and that of the sound engineers here) in not making the textures sound too thick. He did later arrange the piece for conventional string quartet but he brings the original off well, and it is rewarding to hear. Glazunov's Quintet, written with two cellos, perhaps in hopes of finding programme room alongside Schubert's String Quintet, is much more conventional but it is elegantly handled here by the admirable Nash Players. An original and attractive record.

John Warrack

Bottesini

Tarantella. Melodia. Allegretto capriccio. Elegia. Capriccio di bravura. Introduzione e Gavotta.

Grande Allegro di concerto alla Mendelssohn.

Reverie

Knut Erik Sundquist db **Nils Anders Mortensen** pf

Spell Musikk ® SMCD0711 (51' • DDD)



Norwegian bassist in homage to Streicher's Bottesini

Knut Erik Sundquist's recital replicates the contents of a recording by the Viennese virtuoso Ludwig Streicher (Teldec – nla) made some 30 years ago and which, according to Sundquist's note, inspired him to study with Streicher.

This is very fine string-playing. The double bass can produce a peculiarly intense *legato*, which Sundquist exploits with great artistry. The instrument's long string length may deny the wide, intense vibrato beloved of many players of the smaller string instruments but Sundquist uses his narrow vibrato selectively to impart extra sweetness or intensity to particular notes and passages, combining this with sensitive phrasing, excellent intonation and a dexterity that, almost all the time, makes one forget that he's playing an unwieldy instrument. Bass and piano are closely miked, with a background ambience that allows the passages in harmonics to ring out. This suits the double bass well but Nils Anders Mortensen's spirited accompaniments sometimes appear rather hard in quality and occasionally slightly overbearing.

As to the music: Bottesini is an accomplished composer – all the pieces are well crafted, and the *cantabile* items – *Melodia*, *Elegia*, *Reverie* – show an elegant, decorative style that's quite individual. The *Allegro di concerto alla Mendelssohn* is a real oddity – a recomposition of the first movement of Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto, following the form and many harmonic progressions of the original but with different (and certainly inferior) tunes. However, if this item is a disappointment, the same cannot be said of the recital as a whole.

Duncan Druce

Brahms • Grieg

Brahms Clarinet Quintet, Op 115^a

Grieg String Quartet No 1, Op 27

® **Jörg Widmann** cl **Hagen Quartet**

Myrios ® MYR007 (76' • DDD/DSD)



Widmann augments Hagen for the quartet's anniversary disc

It would be hard to imagine a finer version of the sadly neglected Grieg Quartet, the only one he completed. Here the Hagen Quartet celebrate their 30th anniversary with this superb version, gloriously played and recorded, coupling it with the Brahms Clarinet Quintet, in which their fellow Austrian, Jörg Widmann, joins the team.

What is so winning is the natural, unforced flexibility of the Hagen's playing in the Grieg, making it sound totally idiomatic. When Grieg, echoing Norwegian folk music, writes with frequent changes of mood and tempo, that unforced quality is vital. In addition, the dynamic range of their playing is extreme, with their hushed *pianissimos* making one catch the breath before the high contrast of emphatic chordal writing, as at the very start, hits the ear hard and precise. Not only that, the dynamic shading of melody as in the soaring second theme of the first movement is most beautiful, very distinctive of Grieg.

The slow movement in 6/8 becomes a haunting lullaby with a contrasting interlude marked *agitato*. The Intermezzo third movement, with its central *scherzando* Trio section, leads on to the finale, with a brief *Lento* introduction taking one into the main Saltarello section, as light and beautifully sprung as any Mendelssohn *scherzo*.

In the Brahms, Widmann's clarinet is first among equals. Even in the heavenly slow movement, hushed and intense, where the clarinet has the main melodies, the integration with the accompanying strings is what matters. Above all, the performance brings out the mellow, Brahmsian warmth of this late work, inspired by the playing of Richard Mühlfeld. As in the Grieg, the phrasing is flexible with natural, unforced *rubato* in all four movements. Typically for Brahms, the brief third movement, marked *Andantino*, in dactylic rhythm, takes the place of a *scherzo*.

This is the second of the ensemble's discs designed to celebrate their 30th anniversary; they should be congratulated on their success.

Edward Greenfield



Under the spell of Bottesini: pianist Nils Anders Mortensen

Buxtehude

'Opera omnia XV – Chamber Music, Vol 3'

Trio Sonatas, Op 2

Catherine Manson *vn* Paolo Pandolfo *va da gamba*

Ton Koopman *hpd/org* Mike Fentross *lute*

Challenge Classics © CC72254 (73' • DDD)



Koopman's Buxtehude survey reaches the Op 2 Trio Sonatas

The latest addition to Ton Koopman's monumental Buxtehude recording project is the second of two collections of trio sonatas, published in Hamburg in 1696. A number of excellent groups have previously recorded them but none with the authority and wide experience of Buxtehude's music that Koopman can claim.

His colleagues in these performances themselves bring exceptional qualities to the music. Catherine Manson is a subtle yet spirited violinist, who consistently delights and surprises. Paolo Pandolfo, one of the finest viol players of our day, ensures that the viol is always the equal of the violin, and Mike Fentross contributes exquisite improvisatory introductions and ornamented accompaniments on the lute that precisely complement those of Koopman on the

keyboards. In this repertoire, their chamber music playing is surely without peer.

The key to listening to Buxtehude's trio sonatas is an awareness of the *stylus phantasticus*: a finely honed style of composing and performing, specifically favoured by Buxtehude and his north German contemporaries, that conveys the impression of unrestrained improvisation.

The seven trio sonatas of Op 2 each offer a succession of six to eight movements, played without pause, that alternate between superbly modulated slow and fast tempi, and improvisatory and contrapuntal textures, dominated by a dazzling array of ostinato variations. Along the way the listener encounters solos, dialogues and conversations, sublime suspensions, jaunty syncopated and insistent *conciato* (agitated repeated-note) rhythms and expressive, occasionally modal harmonies that compensate for the somewhat lean melodic fare. Wonderfully warm, eventful and ultimately deeply satisfying performances.

Julie Anne Sadle

Beethoven

Piano Trios – No 2, Op No 2; No 5, 'Ghost', Op 70 No 1. Allegretto, WoO39. Variations on an Original Theme, Op 44

Gould Piano Trio

Somm Céleste © SOMMCD0114 (78' • DDD)

Recorded live at St George's, Bristol, October 2011



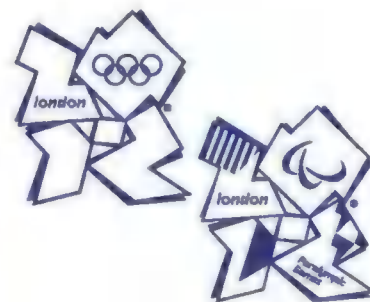
Gould Trio launch live Beethoven trio cycle

Hot on the heels of the Wanderer's complete set of trios comes the first volume from the Gould Trio, captured live at St George's, Bristol, last October. It's a fine recording (and a very quiet audience, until they break into applause), balancing the strings further forwards in the mix than in the Wanderer set. Presumably because it comes from a concert, the Gould have chosen a varied programme rather than a chronological approach, which makes for compelling listening.

They strike a fine balance, offering playing that is characterful but not unduly interventionist, for instance in the opening movement of the *Ghost* or in the lithe *Scherzo* of Op 1 No 2, though in this latter movement the Florestan are even more sparky in their interplay. The Gould's tempo for the opening of the same trio's slow movement is arguably dangerously spacious (though it is marked *Largo*), but I did find Lucy Gould's violin-playing very persuasive. The Wanderer and Florestan make life slightly easier for themselves at a slightly faster speed. The

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Happy birthday to us: Jörg Widmann (centre) and the Hagen Quartet (see page 56)

delightful finale is finely managed. This trio think very much as an ensemble; some groups take greater risks, one individual firing off another, not least the Beaux Arts, who are very compelling here. The Gould judge the extraordinary build-up in the slow movement of the *Ghost* very finely, though for sheer atmosphere the period-instrument Staier/Sepec/Queyras version is unsurpassed.

The beautiful Allegretto, WoO39, is a lovely addition. The Gould revel in its beauties more than the Wanderer (who I found light on charm, though admittedly their tempo is probably more authentic). The Op 44 Variations cry out for an approach that balances charm and sparkle. The Wanderer made a particularly persuasive case for them and from the outset they find more latent energy in the theme than the Gould. But, taken as a whole, this is a fine and musically start to the Gould's Beethoven cycle. **Harriet Smith**

Pf Trios – selected comparisons:

Beaux Arts Trio (3/92⁸) (PHIL) 468 411-2PBS

Florestan Trio (3/03, 11/03, 6/04, 12/04⁸)

(HYPE) CDS44471/4

Trio Wanderer (7/12) (HARM) HMC90 2100/03

Ghost Trio – selected comparison:

Staier, Sepec, Queyras (3/08) (HARM) HMC90 1955

Enescu

Piano Trios – G minor; A minor. *Sérénade lointaine*
Trio Brancusi

Zlg-Zag Territoires © ZTZ303 (53' • DDD)



Paris-formed Trio Brancusi continue to champion Enescu

It was not until 1965 that Hilda Jerea uncovered the not-quite-complete manuscript of Enescu's A minor Piano Trio, composed in 1916 (the year of the Third Piano Suite). It is not clear from Zig-Zag's booklet whether it is Jerea's or Pascal Bentoiu's later edition that is used here but what emerges is a beautifully balanced work in a medium notoriously difficult to balance, scarcely lower in quality than Ravel's near-contemporary Trio, albeit without the latter's gorgeous turn of melody. Enescu's harmonic language is more fully Romantic in origin, the themes more angular and folk-inflected. One wonders why he didn't finish it.

Nineteen years earlier, he did complete the Trio in G minor, which was premiered in 1898 and then sank without trace. This wonderfully ardent trio only returned to view a few years ago on rediscovery of the parts. Contemporaneous with his Op 1, the *Poème roumain*, it is a remarkably assured utterance for a 16-year-old. True, the personal voice is not audible – Brahms's is, rather – but what impresses is the youth's command of the medium.

The fine *Sérénade lointaine* for piano trio (1903) only came to light in 2004, thanks to Sherban Lupu. Trio Brancusi's account is

slightly more measured than their rivals on Indésens and they articulate it far more deftly. In the larger trios, the Brancusi audibly have the measure of the music and if they seem slightly more at home in the earlier G minor (they gave the UK premiere in London in March), their account of the A minor still compels attention. Heartily recommended.

Guy Rickards

Sérénade lointaine – selected comparison:

Bara, Samouil, Grimm (4/12) (INDE) INDE036

Finzi

Romance, Op 11. By Footpath and Stile, Op 2^a.

Prelude. Interlude^b. Elegy, Op 22. Five Bagatelles, Op 23^c

Finzi Quartet with ^aMarcus Farnsworth bar

^bRuth Bolster ob ^cRobert Plane cl

Resonus (M) ▶ RES10109 (73' • DDD)



Resonus with download-only Finzi for voice and ensemble

Although the essence of Finzi's instrumental sound lies in the lush textures of the string orchestra – as symbolised by his long association with the Newbury String Players – there is a more private chamber-music dimension to his output in works such as the early Hardy song-cycle *By Footpath and Stile*, Op 2, and Interlude for oboe and string quartet, Op 21. *By Footpath and Stile* of 1921–22, more modal than many of Finzi's later creations, betrays a balder deference to Vaughan Williams's *On Wenlock Edge* (as does the *Severn Rhapsody*, Op 3, of 1923), especially such songs as the reflective 'Paying calls', 'Where the picnic was' and the pantheistic 'Voices from things growing in a churchyard'. In a manner comparable to Roderick Williams's fine performance with the Sacconi Quartet, Marcus Farnsworth captures the introspective melancholy of the cycle splendidly and the award-winning Finzi Quartet provide an intimately measured accompaniment, full of nuance and tender hues. They also form part of an expressive ensemble with Ruth Bolister in the wistful, yet at times more extrovertly lyrical Interlude, a work of some substance.

The arrangements of the Five Bagatelles, stunningly intimate miniatures originally for piano and clarinet, are sensitively arranged here for clarinet and string quartet by Christian Alexander. They work well, and the scoring for quartet does much to heighten the neo-Baroque polyphony of Finzi's accompaniment, even if a certain percussiveness is lacking from the outer movements. Plane's readings are superb, especially in the extended lyrical movements like the 'Romance', 'Carol' and 'Forlana'. The chamber arrangements of the Romance, Op 11, Elegy, Op 22, and Prelude, Op 25, also have an illuminating clarity, even if at times I personally miss the greater weight

and sonority of the string orchestra.

Jeremy Dibble

By Footpath and Stile – selected comparison:

Williams, Sacconi Qt (NAXO) 8 557963

Halvorsen

Crépuscule. *Elégie*. *Air norvégienne*. *Sarabande with Variations*. *Little Dance Suite*, Op 22. *Concert Caprice on Norwegian Melodies*. *Visionary Dance*. *Five Miniatures*, Op 29. *Andante con moto*
Birgitte Stærnes *vn* **Helge Kjekshus** *pf* with **Berit Cardas**, **Yi Yang** *vns* **Povilas Syrrist-Gelgota** *va* **Frida Fredrikke Waaler Wærvågen** *vc*
MTG Music © MTG20177 (69' • DDD)



Chamber works a complement to Chandos's symphonic series

Thanks to Chandos, four discs of Halvorsen's orchestral music have recently appeared, with one to follow. Johan Halvorsen, born in 1864, a generation after Grieg, was similarly a nationalist but one also wedded to the German tradition, as in his symphonies. Here two talented Norwegian artists, violinist Birgitte Stærnes and pianist Helge Kjekshus, host a group of colleagues in a sequence of Halvorsen's chamber music, mostly of miniatures.

Some of these pieces have never been recorded before, like *Crépuscule*, the very first item, a charming genre piece. *Elégie* is similarly lyrical, while the *Air norvégienne* is longer, in varied sections, with a passionate climax and a witty conclusion. The *Sarabande with Variations* for violin and viola (Povilas Syrrist-Gelgota) takes a theme from Handel's Keyboard Suite No 11 for a set of variations, neatly done.

The *Little Dance Suite* is just what it says, a sequence of genre pieces: gavotte, tarantella, waltz, Norwegian dance and Hungarian dance, all charming, as are the *Concert Caprice* and *Visionary Dance*. The *Five Miniatures*, Op 29, for two violins and piano are more sharply characterised, including the evocative 'Procession at Night', another minor-key elegy with cello joining the ensemble, and 'A Norwegian Melody', in compound time like a tarantella. That leads to a final virtuoso 'Perpetuum mobile', full of fun. The final *Andante con moto* is a piece that the violinist Birgitte Stærnes has herself completed to provide this first recording.

Needless to say, the writing for all these pieces reflects the fact that Halvorsen himself was a violinist who performed these works in his recitals. Altogether an attractive portrait of a composer understandably overshadowed by his great contemporary, Grieg. **Edward Greenfield**

Humperdinck

String Quartet in C. *String Quartet Movements – E minor; C minor*. *Menuet*^a. *Notturmo*^b

Diogenes Quartet with ^b**Lydia Dubrovskaya** *vn*

^a**Andreas Kirpal** *pf*

CPO © CPO777 547-2 (79' • DDD)



Quartets from the magician of Hänsel und Gretel

This well-filled disc contains something like half of Humperdinck's music for string quartet and piano quintet, most of which he composed in the 1870s by the age of 25. Though the music might be fun to play at home or to set as a spot-the-composer challenge for music-loving friends, anyone looking for the magic of *Hänsel und Gretel* or *Königskinder* (both products of the 1890s), or anything close to that, will be hard put to find it.

Charm there certainly is somewhere beneath the surface of the 30-minute Piano Quintet but the piece has outstayed its welcome long before the final *Rondo scherzando* brings that quality to the surface. Even more disappointingly, at the other end of Humperdinck's career, the C major Quartet of 1919–20 is still little more than an exercise in pastiche (Mendelssohn's Octet being the most obvious model), and though the piece has had a handful of recordings in the past and still gets occasional outings in concert, frankly it is not easy to understand why.

There is some wit in the early Menuet for piano quintet, some ambition in the E minor quartet movement and some solid achievement in the C minor movement (which in its day won the Frankfurt Mozart Prize). It is also possible to imagine the *Notturmo* going down well as an encore piece for a quartet with a distinguished guest, though it really needs a freer, more voluptuous tone than Lydia Dubrovskaya supplies here. Elsewhere the playing is enthusiastic and well prepared.

Recording quality leaves a little to be desired in terms of focus and warmth. But the booklet essay is informative and, as a document of a byway in the German Romantic chamber tradition, the disc clearly has value.

David Fanning

Mendelssohn

String Quartets – No 1, Op 12; No 2, Op 13

Minetti Quartet

Hänssler Classic © CD98 645 (51' • DDD)



Austrian ensemble in Mendelssohn's first quartets

Pedants who know that Mendelssohn's Second Quartet was written before his First will love the presentation of this disc as 'Op 13 & 12', as well as the unencumbered pairing of his earliest forays into this genre (although he had by this point already written the Octet). The young Austrian Minetti Quartet tread a careful line between the immaturity of these works and

their enormous intellectual accomplishment.

Although he was still a teenager when he wrote both pieces, he was still reeling from his and his sister Fanny's introduction to Beethoven's late quartets (as were all those writing quartets at that period), and so they nevertheless expound a gravitas that belies the youth of their composer.

The fugue, for instance, around which the second movement of Op 13 centres, is an extraordinary example of Mendelssohn's capacity for Beethovenian intricacy: here, as everywhere, the Minettis control a balance between the appreciation of its greatness and an apprehension of the fact that despite its brilliance, its composer was largely social and avuncular, rather than being the Romantic that Beethoven was, or as passionate as Schumann. Accordingly, they never play anything into the music that is not there. These are, after all, conservative quartets, quite at odds in that way in their reference to Beethoven. The Minettis' clear lines and faultless ensemble keep the phrasing simple and transparent, and there is some heart-stoppingly well-controlled playing at the very top of the register in the first violin.

Caroline Gill

Nobre

'Poema'

Desafio II, Op 31 No 2 *bis*. *Partita latina*, Op 92.

Poema III, Op 94 No 3. *Três Cantos de Iemanjá*.

Cantoria I. *Cantoria II*. *Três Cantilenas*

Leonardo Altino *vc* **Ana Lucia Altino** *pf*

Virtuosi © (67' • DDD)



The varied, imaginative voice of Brazilian Marlos Nobre

This collection of the complete cello music of Brazilian composer Marlos Nobre (played by his much younger compatriot Leonardo Altino) is slightly discombobulating. Trained in electronic music as well as more traditional compositional techniques, Nobre covers almost every base imaginable in this survey: the imaginative forms in which he encloses his blinding array of effects are appealing enough in themselves (*Desafio* – 'challenge'; Latin partita; poem; songs; cantilenas), but within them he introduces the listener to music which oscillates from difficult art music to dance music infused with Brazilian samba, to two pieces for solo cello called *Cantoria I* and *Cantoria II* that display the most extraordinary ability to invoke Bach's Cello Suites with absolutely no musical reference at all.

The music itself isn't particularly challenging but the contrasts are exciting and Altino's incisive and confident playing is undoubtedly the high point of the disc (and although neither quality will necessarily automatically bring a warm tone, they do here). Above all, the intelligence of his musical playing betrays an instinctive understanding of where the music

is going – something that is particularly important here in repertoire that is so unique in its identity and that will be unfamiliar in its style to many. Altino leads the listener through it as if it were mainstream, providing a curious but enjoyable balance: any sense of tonal relentlessness that often hangs around in the wings of a long programme of cello music is banished by the variety of style and interpretation.

Caroline Gill

Schubert

String Quartets – No 13, 'Rosamunde', D804;
No 14, 'Death and the Maiden', D810

Wihan Quartet

Nimbus Alliance © N16189 (80' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Convent of St Agnes, Prague,
June 2011



Wihan Quartet live in Prague
with touchstone Schubert

It is unusual to see a pairing of what are the two most important string quartets of Schubert, and even more unusual to see this mighty pair offered as a live recording. The remastering of the concert has inevitably deadened the sound somewhat (but without totally removing the audience noise). This isn't ultimately necessarily a bad thing – it brings an immediacy to the recording that makes it feel like a live performance at home which, given that there are obvious elements to the performance that would have been ironed out in a studio recording (it is a very top-heavy sound, and there are some bumpy runs and cadences that don't quite come together that jar far more on CD than in the concert hall), are entirely appropriate.

There is very little of the manic oscillation between the joy and despair Schubert must have been feeling when he wrote these quartets, coming, as they did, after he had been told he was 'a man whose health can never be restored'. The wilfulness of the piece's key of A minor to triumph over all is gloriously overridden by A major at the end but, without a strong sense of the battle on the way, it feels like a pyrrhic victory. Ultimately, the problem with this disc is that it doesn't disarm one with its beauty in the way that Schubert ought to. But the question is really whether it is ever possible for a live performance to do that on disc for music like this in any case.

Caroline Gill

Shostakovich - Prokofiev

'The Soviet Experience, Vol 2'

Prokofiev String Quartet No 2, Op 92

Shostakovich String Quartets – No 1, Op 49;
No 2, Op 68; No 3, Op 73; No 4, Op 83

Pacifica Quartet

Cedille © 2 CDR90000 130 (129' • DDD)



Second disc in Pacifica's
Shostakovich pairing project

In a market not short of good accounts of Shostakovich's string quartets, the idea of placing them alongside other representative Soviet quartets offers interesting added value. It would not be stretching a point very far, for example, to propose that the folk- and suite-like elements of Shostakovich's Second Quartet owe something to Prokofiev's Second, composed a couple of years earlier. On the other hand, Prokofiev's positive mindset and Shostakovich's existential angst are thrown into relief by the juxtaposition, which is precisely the point of making it.

I wondered if the fact that I enjoyed the Prokofiev and Shostakovich's Third Quartet more than I did the others was down to my finally having tuned in to the Pacifica Quartet's style. Their playing is always clean and well focused – tonally, technically and interpretatively. But it works best, I feel, when the musical character itself is clear-cut, as it is more or less throughout those two pieces on the second CD. Going back to Shostakovich's First Quartet, I found, as on first listening, a certain reluctance to probe beneath the surface, showing up in less variety of tonal shading and rhythmic nuance than more seasoned ensembles deploy. As a prime example, the first movement feels like a sensitive and musicianly read-through, but one that never questions the way forward; and though the *scherzo* third movement is undoubtedly stable and full of finesse, those qualities should surely be the means to other, subtler ends.

At the other end of the dramatic spectrum, there is more defiance and stoicism to be found in the outer movements of the Second and Fourth Quartets, and in the inner ones of No 3. The ethnic undertones in the finale of No 4 are so understated in the early stages as to be all but absent, though the final page certainly ebbs away most effectively.

In short, if you are looking for excellent modern recording and clean playing, plus the bonus of relevant extra repertoire, or if you are allergic to overstatement in Shostakovich, then there is certainly much to enjoy and admire with the Pacificas. But if a distinctive interpretative angle is your priority, I would advise looking elsewhere.

David Fanning

JACK Quartet


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JACK Quartet

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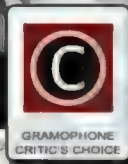
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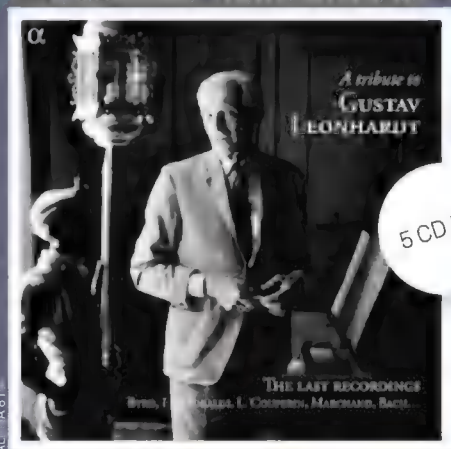
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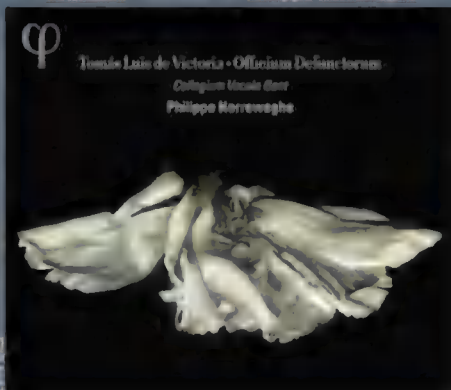
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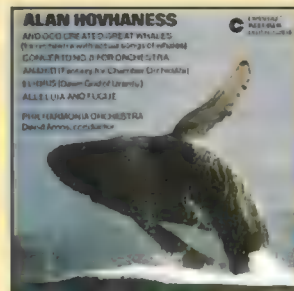
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Standing up for new music: Juan Carlos Garvayo (piano) and José Miguel Gómez (cello) of Trio Arbós



New York new music specialists live at the Wigmore Hall

The CD is illustrated with an image of the JACK Quartet posing like four of *Reservoir Dogs*' renegade hotheads. This is not inappropriate: the young New York-based string quartet's sting as they lash Xenakis's *Tetras* (1983) about the head is coolly controlled...well, 'violence' would be entirely the wrong word, but let's say they play with beautifully choreographed physicality that's punch-drunk on its own vitality.

This is the finest *Tetras* on record since – no coincidence – the JACK's last recording of the piece as part of their complete Xenakis string quartet cycle on Mode. No other quartet quite gets off on Xenakis like the JACKs. Following the strepitous impact of the opening – fundamentals slipping away like a climber's fingers threatening to plunge him into the ravine below – the quartet don't shy away from what comes next: gestures that hollow out polite chamber-music niceties from the inside. A note trembles then cracks with all the finesse of an elastic band snapping; a low-end retort sounds like a one-year-old bashing building blocks together – and all framed within socially awkward, disorientating silences.

As in their approach to Ligeti's 1968 path-finding String Quartet No 2 – where frenzy and stasis are again forced to coexist – the JACK Quartet's instinct for sonic architecture makes sense of it all, Xenakis's teasing games with textures that relentlessly transform, twist inside out, dovetail seamlessly into a polar opposite state of being, reaching a dizzying logical end game at around 7'15" as rapidly bowed, high-register *glissandos* disguise the quartet as some yet-to-be-invented faux-electronic gizmo. After such high praise, to be

honest, I found Cage's *String Quartet in Four Parts* underwhelming. The group's explicit rhythmic steer, good for Ligeti and Xenakis, feels too intentioned here; nor does Matthias Pintscher pulling all those obvious post-Lachenmann levers do much for me. But the all-encompassing scope and ambition of this disc is winsome. Even if you have to lose some. You're all right, JACK. **Philip Clark**

'Affettuoso'

Geminiani Twelve Violin Sonatas, Op 1 – No 7; No 8
Handel Violin Sonata, Op 1 No 13 HWV371 **Piani**
Twelve Violin Sonatas, Op 1 – No 2; No 4; No 8; No 10
Emilio Percan *vn* **Oriol Aymat Fusté** *vc*
Luca Quintavalle *hpd*
Onyx (M) ONYX4099 (75' • DDD)



Percan plays the only known works of Italian Piani

Giovanni Antonio Piani (1678-1760) settled in Paris at the start of the 18th century, at a time when there was increasing interest in Italian instrumental music. His 12 Sonatas, Op 1, published in 1712, are his only known works. They're skilfully written and attractive, showing a certain degree of adaptation to the French taste; but what makes the publication remarkable is the detailed way Piani has indicated bowing, ornamentation, and even fingering and dynamics. In placing his works alongside sonatas by younger, more celebrated contemporaries, Emilio Percan makes up a nicely varied programme in which the lesser-known Piani is by no means outshone.

Percan is an extremely capable violinist. Playing a modern Baroque-style instrument by Johannes Loescher, he makes a fine, bright, ringing tone, and many of the quicker movements sound brilliant and inspiring. But I miss the close engagement with details of

phrasing that makes the performances of the best Baroque specialists so eloquent. For an album entitled 'Affettuoso', it seems a shame that the many appoggiaturas are not leant on with more feeling and affection. His instincts seem often to remain those of a modern virtuoso, whether it's a question of initial attack, articulation or dynamic variation. A number of the slower movements are surely too slow – in a Sarabanda, even when it's marked *Largo assai* (Sonata No 2), we should still be able to sense the underlying rhythm of the dance. One can imagine Piani's music appearing more strongly engaging, then, but Percan has certainly shown us how worthwhile and effective it is. **Duncan Druce**

'Play it Again'

Bunch Slow Dance **Corea** Addendum

Grundman A Walk Across Adolescence

Kats-Chernin Calliope Dreaming **Mozetich** Scales of Joy and Sorrow **Schoenfield** Café Music

Trio Arbós

Non Profit Music (P) NPM1012 (69' • DDD/DSD)



Modern classics re-recorded by Spanish Trio Arbós

Trio Arbós has been nothing if not assiduous in its coverage of the piano trio repertoire and its new disc rings the changes with a number of shorter works designed to be heard as a single recital. As the title suggests, most of them have already been recorded, yet they undeniably stand to benefit when heard in the present context.

Kenji Bunch sets things going with his rhapsodic evocation of things lived and dreamt, then Marjan Mozetich contributes a chamber concerto whose suavely expressive central 'Arabesque' is framed by two movements that progressively accrue and disperse rhythmic energy in like manner. Jorge Grundman conjures up a range of memories reticent and impulsive during the course of his work, while Elena Kats-Chernin pays homage to Haydn in an inventive miniature which reduces the essentials of symphonic form within its highly resourceful dimensions. Paul Schoenfield scored considerable success with his piece two decades ago and its breezy recollections of jazz, blues and ragtime seem tailor-made for a medium not without its 'popular' associations.

No self-respecting recital would be complete without its designated encore, which here comes courtesy of Chick Corea at his most engaging and unaffected. Vividly immediate sound, together with detailed booklet-notes, further enhance the attractions of a disc that reaffirms the credentials of Trio Arbós as among the most inclusive and forward-thinking of chamber ensembles: evidently this is a programme ideal for touring purposes, and hopefully the group will be bringing it over to London before too long. **Richard Whitehouse**

Instrumental



Bryce Morrison reviews Haydn from Marc-André Hamelin:

'Time and again he sets up a convention only to enliven and vivify it with a teasing assortment of diversions' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 67**



Caroline Gill reviews Telemann from Ori Kam:

'The viola has an edifyingly chameleonesque ability to adapt to the voice of its player'

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 69**

Arensky

Suites for Two Pianos –

No 1, Op 15; No 2, 'Silhouettes', Op 23;

No 3, 'Variations', Op 33; No 4, Op 62

Natalla Lavrova, Vassily Primakov *pfs*

LP Classics (M) 1001 (71' • DDD)



Moscow-born pianists launch label with two-piano Arensky

The 150th anniversary of the birth of Anton Arensky passed by all but unnoticed last year. To make amends, here is a captivating disc of his four suites for two pianos, the first release on this new label founded by the two pianists.

Suite No 2, *Silhouettes* (1892), consists of five character pieces; Suite No 3, *Variations* (1894), the longest of the four, is a theme and (nine highly diverse and diverting) variations – try Var 4, a delicious musical box evocation, and Var 6, a gossamer-light *Scherzo*, superbly dispatched by Lavrova and Primakov. Suite No 4 (1901) is the most harmonically adventurous of the four while still tinged with nostalgia and which, in the finale, looks back to Arensky's idol, Chopin.

Suite No 1 (1890) contains the composer's best-known piece, the second-movement Waltz, memorably recorded by Ossip Gabrilowitsch and Harold Bauer in 1929. It's one of the classics of the gramophone. Lavrova and Primakov come as close as any I have heard to equalling its charm, elegance and unruffled virtuosity. These are qualities that characterise the disc as a whole and make it preferable to the Hyperion release of exactly the same programme recorded back in 1994 by the excellent Stephen Coombs and Ian Munro, on which the two pianos are recorded in a more resonant acoustic, one that rather complements the pianists' more strident, hard-driven approach.

Alternating between suites from Piano 1 to Piano 2 (two Yamaha CFX grands), Lavrova and Primakov are in perfect accord temperamentally and musically. I wish their enterprise well. **Jeremy Nicholas**

Selected comparison – coupled as above:

Coombs, Munro (HYPE) CDA66755

Beethoven

Beethoven Variations on a Waltz by Anton Diabelli, 'Diabelli Variations', Op 120, preceded by variations on Diabelli's waltz by Czerny, Hummel, Kalkbrenner, Kerzkowsky, Kreutzer, Moscheles, Liszt, Pixls, FXW Mozart and Schubert

Andreas Staier *fp*

Harmonia Mundi (H) HMC90 2091 (68' • DDD)



Staier's Diabelli Variations come just before Brautigam's

Before launching into Beethoven's *Diabelli Variations*, Andreas Staier offers an overture of sorts. He commences with Anton Diabelli's C major Waltz, then follows with eight variations by composers invited by Diabelli to contribute a variation upon that waltz for a benefit anthology. Next, Staier improvises a stylish interlude that provides a bridge that leads straight into Beethoven's magnum keyboard opus. Staier's perfectly judged tempi, angular demeanour, characterful contrasts, biting accents and cumulative sweep add up to a performance that abounds with probing details yet never loses sight of the music's grand design.

Notice, for example, the minuscule shadings and stresses that spice up Staier's suave and steady dispatch of Var 2's chords alternating between the hands, or his supple, pliable response to Var 4's *poco più vivace* directive that emerges relatively slow and clunky in Gary Cooper's fortepiano rendition. In Var 5, Cooper's flaccid repeated-note phrases are no match for Staier's buoyant rhythm and focused phrasing. Staier gets Var 9's often vaguely articulated accents absolutely right, while Var 10's dynamic surges propel the fast scale-wise chords over the bar-lines (so different from Paul Lewis's less eventful symmetry). Staier gauges Var 13's humorous pauses with masterful comic timing, while Beethoven's parody on Mozart's 'Notte e giorno faticar' from *Don Giovanni*, Var 22, is convincingly enhanced by the fortepiano's discreet percussion stop. However, the cymbal crash accompanying Var 23's big chords pulls focus from the scampering runs that follow, and arguably approaches bad taste. By contrast, the concluding minor-key variations flow with eloquent simplicity and a true singing tone.

Although it may be prudent to wait and see how Ronald Brautigam's upcoming recording pans out, Staier's is too good to ignore. This is far and away the most stimulating and best-played fortepiano *Diabelli Variations* on compact disc. **Jed Distler**

Selected comparisons:

Cooper (6/11) (CHNN) CCSSA29110

Lewis (8/11) (HARM) HMC90 2071

Beethoven

'Piano Sonatas, Vol 1'

Piano Sonatas – No 1, Op 2 No 1; No 2, Op 2 No 2; No 3, Op 2 No 3; No 4, Op 7; No 5, Op 10 No 1; No 6, Op 10 No 2; No 7, Op 10 No 3; No 8, 'Pathétique', Op 13; No 9, Op 14 No 1; No 10, Op 14 No 2. Presto, WoO52. Prestissimo (original finale of Op 10 No 1)

Jean-Efflam Bavouzet *pf*

Chandos (M) (S) CHAN10720 (3h 34' • DDD)



First volume in Bavouzet's Beethoven cycle for Chandos

Freedom towards rhythm, passagework impulsively incautious, insight into music streaming through a unique combination of intellectual and emotional responses, and an ability to maintain suspense over long spans: that was Artur Schnabel, one of the most singular of 20th-century pianists, whose 1930s recordings of Beethoven are still available. And inimitable; but can you go the other way?

Muted beginnings from Jean-Efflam Bavouzet suggest that you can. Make no mistake, his playing is immaculate. Yet in a number of sonatas his is, mostly, an immaculate presentation of their structural logic. The first movement of Op 2 No 1 (placement is in chronological order) isn't a fiery exposé and the slow movement, taken too quickly for *Adagio*, is no more than elegant. They represent how little Bavouzet gives of himself in many a movement, though not all. He drops some inhibitions to get close to the spirit inherent in the *Largo appassionato* of Op 2 No 2 and the finales of Op 2 Nos 1 and 2. Inexplicably, then, he reverts to form in the *Adagio* of Op 2 No 3, depriving the long E minor section of its moody poetry to which Andrés Schiff homes in shrewdly; and, unlike François-Frédéric Guy, he balks at scaling the full dimension of the

awesome *Largo con gran espressione* from Op 7, where 'measured silence becomes as eloquent as sound' (Denis Matthews). As in Op 13, too, Bavouzet goes thus far and no further.

The tide turns with Op 10. Excellent pianism now gets bedded into genuine interpretation. Bavouzet jettisons fastidious reserve for a personal perspicacity that reaches deep into the music and, heard from the first bars of the C minor Sonata, No 1, the upwardly sweeping motifs tautly heralding the drama to come. Besides, he stays the course, not only here but in the other two sonatas as well, animating, broadening, retarding and accenting lines, implied passions revealed according to how he senses them. But grip doesn't slip, as in the coda of the first sonata's slow movement. The last 11 bars, marked *pianissimo*, are recreated with a mastery over pedalling, dynamics and weighting of notes, a mastery that also touches the droll humour in the fugue-style finale of No 2 and despair in the *Largo e mesto* of No 3. Similar acumen is retained for the Op 14 pair, only tainted by a miscalculated choice of *allegretto* for the *Andante* of No 2.

Two rejected movements from Op 10 No 1 are included. Make of them what you will, and tolerate a piano closely miked so as to negate venue ambience. But unyielding sound – more so on discs 2 and 3 – notwithstanding, Bavouzet when performing at his finest is the thing here. Do listen. **Nalen Anthoni**

Selected comparisons:

Schiff (12/05, 7/06, 2/07)

(ECM) 476 3054, 476 3100, 476 3155

Guy (4/12) (ZZT) ZZT111101

Beethoven

Piano Sonatas – No 30, Op 109; No 31, Op 110; No 32, Op 111

Antti Siirala *pf*

CAvi-Music © AVI8553227 (66' • DDD)



Beethoven Competition winner Siirala in the last three sonatas

Antti Siirala gets off to a strong start in Op 109's first movement by virtue of his graceful phrasing and beautifully calibrated *ritardandos*. The second movement is a true *Prestissimo* and astute listeners will notice that Siirala is one of the few pianists (along with Charles Rosen, Freddy Kempf and Annie Fischer) who clearly differentiate the composer's *legato* and detached articulations. His smooth transitions and long-lined trills stand out in the theme and variations.

My only criticism of Op 110 concerns Siirala's tendency to slightly round off cadences and begin certain phrases a shade under tempo; the *Allegro molto*, for example, falls short of the impact and ferocity distinguishing Stephen Kovacevich's. Still, Siirala must be credited for integrating the final movement's elusive tempo

relationships and building the fugue with impressive exultation.

Op 111 features strong, clear fingerwork throughout, along with a luminous, full-bodied quality in the opening statement of the Arietta and extensive quieter passages, although Pollini's more incisive *Allegro* and firmer control in the dotted rhythms of the Arietta remain the gold standard. Quibbles aside, it says a lot that Siirala's polished and intelligent pianism can hold its own in a catalogue overloaded with excellence. **Jed Distler**

Op 110 – selected comparison:

Kovacevich (2/94*) (EMI) 215314-2

Op 111 – selected comparison:

Pollini (7/90*) (DG) 449 740-2G0R2

Beethoven • Ligeti

Beethoven Piano Sonata No 32, Op 111

Ligeti Etudes, Books 1 & 2

Jeremy Denk *pf*

Nonesuch © 7559 53056-2 (77' • DDD)



More composer juxtaposition from American pianist Denk

Among younger piano personalities breaking through the international scene, Jeremy Denk has garnered attention for ambitious recital programmes juxtaposing Ives's *Concord* Sonata and Beethoven's *Hammerklavier*, or playing Ligeti's Etudes alongside Bach's *Goldberg Variations*, not to mention his clever blog. His first Nonesuch release sandwiches Beethoven's valedictory C minor Sonata between Books 1 and 2 of Ligeti's Etudes. The pianist's reasons for doing so concern both composers' pronounced use of syncopation and rhythmic dislocation, along with the connection between 'Beethoven's vast, timeless canvas and Ligeti's bite-size bits of infinity'.

As it happens, Denk swallows Ligeti's bite-size bits whole, with a slightly heavier touch in relation to the more translucent Aimard and Ullén recordings, although this could result from producer Adam Abeshouse's closer, slightly strident sonic perspective. For example, Denk boasts impressive rhythmic vitality throughout 'Touches bloquées' (No 3), yet there's more dynamic contrast and stronger *legato/staccato* differentiation in Aimard's more lilting rendition. By contrast, Denk's more animated pace and firmer projection of inner voices and pedalling contrasts add extra degrees of colour and character to 'Galamb borong' (No 7). Although Ligeti requests that one play the overlapping chromatic lines throughout 'Vertige' (No 9) *prestissimo* and *molto legato* at the start, Denk's slower, more overtly articulated conception better allows the listener to absorb the music's harmonic tension.

Jaded listeners who've sat through umpteenth Beethoven Op 111 recordings will be surprised and (hopefully) convinced how Denk will not

GRAMOPHONE *Archive*

Beethoven's last sonatas

Three pianists who came before Siirala and Denk, and how Gramophone rated them



FEBRUARY 1994

Beethoven Piano Sonata No 31, Op 110
Stephen Kovacevich *pf*

EMI © 754896-2 (53' • DDD)

Few pianists today – not Brendel, not Ashkenazy, not Serkin – can free themselves of self-awareness enough to find the tender simplicity of the opening *Moderato cantabile*. Kovacevich can, and he goes on to fill each moment of figuration and trilling with light. His finale has a mesmeric inwardness generated by the seemingly infinite nuances he can find in a single repeated note. A steadiness of purpose in the *Arioso* leads naturally into the quiet self-assurance of the effortless building of the *Fuga*. The little Op 78 and the *Waldstein* make for a sensitively built recital in its own right. Again, Kovacevich's skill at drawing the listener in marks the Op 78 Sonata. The *Waldstein* positively tingles with life: Kovacevich's joy in the physical excitement and momentum of the writing is equalled by his strength in delineating the song at its heart. *Hilary Finch*



FEBRUARY 1964

Beethoven Piano Sonata No 32, Op 111
Shura Cherkassky *pf*

World Record Club © T271 (12in, 26s 6d)

The first movement has great clarity and a good line, although one sometimes wonders whether the total effect isn't going to hang fire. Part of the trouble seems to be that Cherkassky's playing concentrates very much on the moment, the trees rather than the wood: his outlook encompasses small territories only and the lofty, Olympian view of Beethoven such as ■ Schnabel or ■ Klemperer could command is just not his. But he plays well – supremely confident and with a spirit of intelligent inquiry. *Stephen Plaistow*



AUGUST 1950

Beethoven Piano Sonata No 32, Op 111
Solomon *pf*

HMV © C4000-3 (12in, 23s)

Beethoven's last sonata sums up and subtilises the whole of his experience in sonata writing. Solomon seems to me to unite most of the virtues of his predecessors and he has, of course, the advantage of greatly improved piano recording. It is clear from the start that he has taken the full measure of this great work and is himself, so to speak, tuned to greatness. His articulation of the giant tread of the *Allegro*'s theme seems to me to be exactly right and the detail of the double counterpoint of the free fugue is admirably clear. Solomon has given us here the high perfection of his art and the engineers have splendidly responded. In these difficult days music such as this renews and fortifies the spirit. *Alec Robertson*

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gramophone.co.uk

linger over freer passages yet, within them, strategically and specifically lean on a specific note. However, in the Arietta, Denk's tiny speed-ups and expressive emendations sometimes distract from the variations' inherent breadth and cumulative trajectory. In fact, Denk's pushing ahead in Var 3 causes the very syncopations he loves to even out. The long chains of trills would also benefit from more breadth and serenity. I should mention the pianist's occasional breaking of hands (playing the left hand slightly before the right) – all right, Jeremy, you provoked my attention!

Jeremy Distler

Ligeti – selected comparisons:

Aimard (1/97) (SONY) SK62308

Ullén (1/97) (BIS) BIS-CD783

Chopin

Ballade No 2, Op 38. Fantaisie, Op 49. Mazurkas – No 5, Op 7 No 1; No 32, Op 50 No 3; No 50, 'Notre temps', Op *posth*. Nocturne No 16, Op 55 No 2. Polonaise No 2, Op 26 No 2. Preludes, Op 28 – No 10; No 11; No 13. Scherzo No 2, Op 31. Waltzes – No 3, Op 34 No 2; No 8, Op 64 No 3; No 14, Op *posth*

Janina Fialkowska *pf*

ATMA Classique © ACD2 2666 (76' • DDD)



Follow-up to Fialkowska's acclaimed 2010 Chopin

For her second Chopin album, Janina Fialkowska once again offers a carefully chosen miscellany rather than a more conventional chronology. And, to an even greater extent than before, her performances blaze and challenge with a potent and highly individual sense of drama. Her curtain-raiser, the E flat minor Polonaise, at once gives the lie to quaint notions of Chopin as a salon figure. Bold and portentous, it is almost as if the Grim Reaper himself had spoken, with parameters stretched far beyond conventional wisdom, a far cry indeed from, say, Pollini's daunting austerity.

For Fialkowska, Chopin can take on something of the dark-hued austerity of late Liszt and when you hear her unleash such a formidable tempest of sound in the *presto* storms of the Second Ballade, you seem to see Delacroix's pained and tortured portrait of the composer. Her F minor Fantaisie is of a grandeur rarely met with on disc, her Second Scherzo, broadly paced, of a quasi-symphonic breadth and weight. Even in the Op 64 A flat Waltz, you sense an underlying unrest, and if Fialkowska sometimes bears down heavily on some of Chopin's more intimate and fragrant utterances (the Op 55 Nocturne's elegant and multi-directional tracery), there is never any doubting her strength of purpose. All this is a striking advance on earlier recordings, with their more conventional notion of interpretation, and to crown it all Fialkowska has been superbly recorded. **Bryce Morrison**

Chopin

Complete Preludes. Barcarolle, Op 60.

Fantaisie, Op 49

Vanessa Perez *pf*

Telarc © TEL33388-02 (00' • DDD)



Pianist-product of El Sistema in the Chopin Preludes

To whom do you turn for the perfect set of Chopin Preludes? Personally, I don't think such a thing exists, though many have come close – Moiseiwitsch in 1948, Cherkassky in 1968, Argerich in 1975 and, of course, Cortot in 1934 whose B flat minor Prelude equals Josef Lhévinne's legendary 1936 recording in its awesome finesse. So how does this newcomer (no recording date is given) from the glamorous Venezuelan-American compare?

Question marks appear over the very first Prelude, with its uncertain line and peremptory final bar. Nor does the close piano recording help the lugubrious A minor Prelude to sing. But then things get better. If No 3 is given a literal reading, the left-hand *leggeramente* semiquavers are dispatched faultlessly with a light pedal. It's as though Ms Perez has taken a little time to settle down and warm up because, by the time we reach the F sharp major Prelude (No 13), we are listening to playing of real depth and poetry. If the 'Raindrop' Prelude will be too drawn-out for some tastes, no such reservation can be applied to her scintillating execution of the treacherous B flat minor (only Moiseiwitsch and Argerich, of those listed above, are faster). All in all, a serious contender and she includes, as does Argerich in her resonant and often over-pedalled recording, both the stand-alone C sharp minor Prelude and Op *posth* in A flat major. Completing the disc are the Barcarolle, given a lovely quasi-improvisatory air, and a sturdy, thoughtful account of the Fantaisie in F minor.

Jeremy Nicholas

Chopin

Rondos – Op 1; 'à la Mazur', Op 5; Op 16; Op 73.

Fantaisie, Op 49

Elżbieta Karaś-Krasztel *pf*

Dux © DUX0796 (53' • DDD)



Rondos and the Op 49 Fantaisie from Pole Karaś-Krasztel

Chopin's four rondos for solo piano make a pleasant sequence. In the first two we can see him struggling to find his unique voice (they were written in his mid-teens); the Rondo in C, Op 73, is more usually heard in its piano duet version than the original heard here; and the Rondo in E flat, Op 16, again too seldom heard, is one of the last works Chopin wrote in the crowd-pleasing brilliant style. Elżbieta Karaś-Krasztel plays Op 1 with a quiet hand

and a lovely, even tone (the piano is closely recorded but not uncomfortably so). The simplicity and directness of her approach is entirely appropriate and, indeed, engaging. But as we progress to Op 5, a feeling of déjà vu begins to descend.

The *Rondo à la Mazur* sounds the same – an almost unvarying *mezzo-forte* dynamic and the same *tempo moderato* throughout – and, though the Rondo in C is invested with a little more vim, by the time we get to the main (*allegro vivace*) section of the Rondo in E flat we have to admit that Karaś-Krasztel comes across as elegant but bland. For Op 16 at its best, turn to Horowitz or, better still, Anatole Kitain in 1938. For all four Rondos with real character, go for Naxos's Idil Biret.

The Fantaisie in F minor, played in the same Warsaw radio studio in 2010, 15 years later than the Rondos, is warmly recorded in a performance of some depth and obvious affection. This is the finest playing on a disc with the not overly generous timing of 52'54".

Jeremy Nicholas

Debussy

'Piano Music, Vol 1'

Préludes – Book 1. Les soirs illuminés par l'ardeur du charbon. Khamma. Intermède. Toomai des éléphants. Petite valse (both compl Orledge)

Michael Korstick *pf*

Hänssler Classic © CD93 290 (73' • DDD)



An imaginative musician launches a new Debussy series

Were you to hear for the first time Debussy's 12 Preludes, Book 1, in the hands of Michael Korstick you would count yourself lucky. Here, you would think, is everything the music calls for: atmosphere, tonal colouring, acute observation of the score, subtle characterisation and, not least, a beautiful recorded sound. It is only when you turn to someone like the *Gramophone* Award-winning Jean-Efflam Bavouzet (Chandos, 7/07) that you hear other things that are not necessarily in the score. Certainly he can 'do' *murmuré, quasi guitarra, dans une brume* and other Debussian requests better than most but he also makes you smile in the process. His are the Preludes with Gallic charm.

Debussy's last known piano piece, *Les soirs illuminés par l'ardeur de charbon* ('Evenings lit up by glowing coals') was also recorded by Bavouzet for his Chandos cycle, as was *Khamma*, his 'curious ballet with its trumpet-calls which savour of revolt and fire and send a shiver down your back' (Debussy's description) – except that Bavouzet plays a 'lightly edited' version of the score, while Korstick adopts the piece as 'notated by Debussy in a sort of two-piano version' (Korstick), only playable by double-tracking himself for eight bars between 17'28" and 17'51". Hänssler, incidentally, offers



Marc-André Hamelin: magnificent in Haydn as his Hyperion cycle continues

a useful summary of the ballet's libretto against the time-code of Korstick's recording.

That is not all. We have *Intermède*, among Debussy's earliest compositions, though not a first recording as claimed, *Toomai des éléphants* (completed by Robert Orledge, who also contributes the exemplary booklet), originally destined to be the 11th Prelude of Book 2, and *Petite valse* of c1915, the manuscript of which surfaced as recently as 2004. The last two are world-premiere recordings. Altogether an auspicious start to the cycle.

Jeremy Nicholas

Hauer

Etudes, Op 22

Steffen Schleiermacher *pf*

Dabringhaus und Grimm © MDG613 1640-2 (61' • DDD)



Piano studies by the 'other' Schoenberg

Josef Matthias Hauer was the early-20th-century Austrian atonal composer who wasn't Arnold Schoenberg. At one stage the two were chummy enough to consider collaborating on a textbook about atonal composition but, as Steffen Schleiermacher's scene-setting booklet-notes remind us, they were soon locked into a furious ideological ruck about who actually 'invented' 12-tone composition. But you do

wonder how the two men could ever have collaborated on anything, listening to Hauer's 1923 Piano Etudes. Atonality for Schoenberg was all about liberating gestures from Romantic archetypes; even when he evoked 'classical' models, his methods put clear distance between himself and his source. Schoenberg manipulated tone rows; Hauer's atonal music was based on symmetrically organised chords. Where Schoenberg needed to be pushed far outside his comfort zone as creative necessity, there is something prosaic about Hauer's system – a prop to lean on whenever inspiration is failing.

And for pieces meant to be atonal, these Etudes sound clumsily tonal. The zig-zag of his melodic lines slinks lazily against harmonically declawed cadence points; and once a line has established itself, Hauer simply transposes it over another tonal centre. Which works fine until he chances upon an intriguingly insoluble chromatic riddle in Etude No 5 – think Satie's *Vexations* – and is obliged to take a view on where his material might go. Then Hauer bottles it. His system lacks flexibility to embrace the unexpected.

Anything illuminating that interim period in music history when, just for a moment, fundamental truths about harmony were up for grabs is of interest, and Hauer does make you appreciate Schoenberg's expressive and

technical genius all the more. Schleiermacher's neutral detachment – he doesn't attempt to fashion Hauer's melodies into neat phrases – is appropriate; although, by letting his lines go for a walk, Schleiermacher inadvertently reveals Hauer's tendency to plod. **Philip Clark**

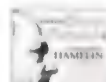
Haydn

Piano Sonatas – HobXVI/1; HobXVI/2; HobXVI/6; HobXVI/20; HobXVI/22; HobXVI/25; HobXVI/29; HobXVI/36; HobXVI/44; HobXVI/47bis Add; HobXVI/51

Marc-André Hamelin *pf*

Hyperion © (two discs for the price of one)

CDA67882 (158' • DDD)



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Marc-André Hamelin's third Haydn volume reaches a halfway mark in 60 or so sonatas of tireless range, wit and inventiveness. And, as in Hyperion's first two double-CD issues (5/07, 10/09), you are left to marvel at both composer and interpreter. How instructive, too, to be told by Richard Wigmore in his notes that if Haydn took a modest view of his skills as a performer, he compensated with an endlessly evolving compositional virtuosity. Time and again he sets up a convention or 'polished *galanterie*' only to enliven and vivify it with a teasing



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assortment of diversions and surprises. This is hardly the same as 'facetiousness' (a celebrated pianist who once told me that unlike Mozart, Haydn should be dining with the servants rather than the aristocrats).

True, works such as the great C minor Sonata and the F minor Variations are exceptional in their expressive intensity but if 'brightness' only occasionally 'falls from the air' (Thomas Nashe), the majority of the sonatas, with their volte-face humour and open-hearted delight in the unexpected, reflect a joy in compositional wizardry. Such qualities are dazzlingly articulated by Hamelin, with one performance after another of crystalline brilliance and musicianship. Hear his gloriously perky and resilient opening to the G major Sonata (HobXVI/6) or the way he conveys the mock grandeur of the B flat Sonata (HobXVI/2), almost as if the citizens of Lilliput were on parade, before relishing the *Largo*'s sudden melancholy (*molto espressivo*). He captures all of the C minor Sonata's grandeur (its simultaneously elegiac and assuaging use of sixths and thirds) and is warmly conciliatory in the *Andante* before firing off the finale's testy and explosive whimsy. These are magnificent performances and clearly a prime love for Hamelin. **Bryce Morrison**

Skelton

*SKURA (Complete Works)

Richard Skelton *insts*

Sustain-Release  (12h 23' • DDD)



Richard Skelton's musical landscape on audio DVD

Richard Skelton created the body of work documented on this audio DVD when he lived on the West Pennine Moors between 2005 and 2011. Originally released over 20 CDs, here Skelton has assembled an archive edition of music that's not *about* landscape – it's *of* the landscape, recorded inside isolated farmhouse ruins and wind-wrecked expanses of al fresco space where musicians normally fear to tread.

When in the field, Skelton improvises with/against the landscape, his instrumental figurations rolling with the changes of wind current, the squally rain, the acoustic variables that come with walking 20 paces over there. Because he wants their intrinsic resonant properties to be altered and transformed by the elements, he smudges earth into the frets, strings and innards of his violin, guitar, mandolins and concertinas, and has even encased his instruments in soil. And then a composerly part of Skelton takes over in the studio as he layers and mixes these source recordings into sonic structures; some simple, song-like forms, others that display a Brucknerian ambition of extended form and scale. If that makes

Skelton's project sound unappealingly New Age, his authentic engagement with the beautiful/terrifying isolation of this landscape is palpable, and 'SKURA' is also rooted in personal tragedy. Skelton's wife Louise died in 2004, aged 28, and these soundscapes were imagined during epic, cathartic walks as he filtered his grief. The 35-minute *Stolen Ground* from 'Landings' (2006) is anchored by loops that overlap and collide; but only after initially uprooted, shell-shocked sounds have found their direction. String lines emerge, their overtones dancing intimately or wrenching themselves apart. Shorter pieces are like tender, momentary snapshots.

There's no catalogue number – you simply log on to the Sustain-Release website, pay up and an exciting parcel arrives in the mail a few days later. 'SKURA' is accompanied by a slim paperback book. Each album is prefaced with a poem and there are introductory essays by Tony Herrington from experimental music bible *The Wire* and Andrew Male from rock magazine *Mojo*. And now Skelton finds himself in *Gramophone* – proof that emotional candour and formal wizardry render any perceived cultural and aesthetic divide meaningless.

Philip Clark

Telemann

Twelve Fantasias, TWV40/14-25

Ori Kam *va*

Berlin Classics  0300390BC (76' • DDD)



The Jerusalem Quartet's viola transcribes Telemann Fantasias

These 12 Fantasias, which together comprise 41 high-Baroque morsels, fall into two sets of six: the first largely sorrowful and mournful, the second happy *galanteries*. Originally written for the violin, Ori Kam (viola player of the Jerusalem Quartet) has transcribed them for viola, respectfully pointing out in the booklet-notes that, as Telemann was such a performance butterfly (he constantly expressed his desire to learn 'every' instrument and played many of them well), he hopes he wouldn't have minded. Interestingly, as the viola is so much closer to the human voice in its register (just bringing the notes down a register makes them suddenly warm up), it has an edifyingly chameleonesque ability to adapt to the voice of its player.

It is certainly true on this recording that Ori Kam's voice is completely his own and that as a result these little vignettes come across less as musical soundbites than free-standing monologues. It's a joyful and engaging way of hearing them, and due not only to the beauty of Telemann's writing – there is his own native folk music in there, along with polyphony, and internal dialogue that Bach himself could have

been pleased with, as well as the kind of sequences that light up his Viola Concerto with such joy – but to the variety of colours and moods Kam brings to its performance. He is given a particular opportunity to make music here (the pieces are more concerned with sonority and melody than virtuosity), and he seizes it with as much enthusiasm as Telemann evidently had for its composition. **Caroline Gill**

Ustvolskaya

Piano Sonatas – No 1; No 2; No 3; No 4; No 5; No 6

Markus Hinterhäuser *pf*

Col Legno  WVEICD50502 (73' • DDD)

From WVEICD20019 (2/99)



Markus Hinterhäuser's Ustvolskaya from 1998

Markus Hinterhäuser's complete Ustvolskaya piano sonata cycle, recorded in 1998, never did quite cut the mustard like Marianne Schroeder's 1994 Hat Hut performances. And then, in 2006, Sabine Liebner moved Ustvolskaya interpretation to new heights with a cycle for Neos that felt intelligently integrated and sounded brazenly strepitous. So whither Hinterhäuser now?

He remains, I'm afraid to say, a definite third choice – never a disastrous, confiscate-his-instrument third, but his cycle has simply been superseded by subsequent events. Liebner never mistakes Ustvolskaya's austere, stentorian sound world for simple greyness but Hinterhäuser sometimes slips perilously close. Through sheer physical insistence, in Liebner's hands the Third Sonata (1952) is shell-shocked by its own existence; melodic fragments cut like serrated knives, obsessively struck chains of cluster formations make the piano resonate like you never heard before. The surface of Hinterhäuser's performance hints at those possibilities but it's neat and chanceless.

The Sixth Sonata (1988) reduces Ustvolskaya's now-familiar trademark gestures to an archetypal essence. In Liebner, ghosts of sonatas past swarm; in Hinterhäuser the piece merely sounds like a sparser version of the first five. Given that Liebner also offers Ustvolskaya's 12 Preludes, feeder works for the gestural vocabulary of the sonatas, really it's a no-brainer. **Philip Clark**

Selected comparisons – coupled as above:

Schroeder (HATH) HATN179

Liebner (NEOS) NEOS10904/5

Behzod Abduraimov

Liszt *Bénédiction de Dieu dans la solitude*, S173

No 3. Mephisto Waltz No 1, 'Der Tanz in der

Dorfschenke', S514 *Prokofiev* Suggestion

diabolique, Op 4 No 4. Piano Sonata No 6, Op 82

Saint-Saëns Danse macabre (trans Liszt/Horowitz)

Behzod Abduraimov *pf*

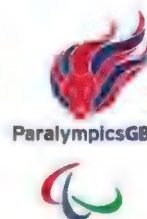
Decca  478 3301DH (71' • DDD)



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Decca debut for London Piano Competition winner

Here is a good-themed programme from this 20-year-old Uzbek newcomer of 'demonic dances, God and war, combining technical virtuosity with music fireworks'. But it's a debut disc which, impressive as it is, doesn't quite come off.

The piano is very closely recorded. Even though the instrument has a quiet pedal action it is all too audible, though not as distractingly as Abduraimov's stentorian breathing. As to the playing, I have a feeling that at present he might be more effective in the concert hall than in the studio. Listen to the opening measures of Prokofiev's Sonata No 6. It's all there, just as the composer notated it. Turn to Sviatoslav Richter and there is an (essential) extra element: vehemence. The music is horrid in the original meaning of the word (spiky, threatening), while the finale is urgent and unsettling, a reading that is altogether more emotionally engaging. Similarly, while Abduraimov offers enviable power and speed in the *Suggestion diabolique*, Op 4 No 4, the composer (1935) takes the diablerie a step further. The *Bénédiction* is sensitively shaped, if too ponderous for my taste. The First *Mephisto Waltz* is fast, accurate and powerful but it won't have you on the edge of your seat like Khatia Buniatishvili's recent 'dance at the village inn' on Sony. 'Could this fresh-faced child be the new Horowitz?' asks *The Independent*, quoted on the cover. No, but he's a new face on the scene with bags of talent whose future will be well worth following.

Jeremy Nicholas

Prokofiev *Pf Son No 6* – selected comparison:

Richter (RCA) 09026 63844-2

Liszt *Mephisto Waltz* – selected comparison:

Buniatishvili (9/11) (SONY) 88697 76604-2

Menahem Pressler



Beethoven Piano Sonata No 31, Op 110 **Chopin** Mazurkas – No 5, Op 7 No 1; No 7, Op 7 No 3; No 13, Op 17 No 4. Nocturne No 20, Op *posth* **Debussy** *Estampes* **Schubert** Piano Sonata No 21, D960 **Menahem Pressler** *pf*

Idéale Audience International © 307 9668

(88' • NTSC • 16:9 • PCM stereo • D)

Recorded live at the Cité de la Musique, Paris, March 2011



Near-nonagenarian pianist on film at the Cité de la Musique

After many years as the pianist in the celebrated Beaux Arts Trio, Menahem Pressler made a dramatic return to his first fame as a solo artist. And here, at the age of nearly 90, he makes you more than ever aware of his probing and deeply committed musicianship. His students were privileged indeed, though he could be a stern

taskmaster. I recall a very public crossing of swords in Chicago when I objected to his cruel onslaught on a luckless young pianist. There, Pressler's much-loved warmth and geniality vanished as if by perverse magic.

But at this recital one can only celebrate a blessedly old-fashioned freedom and intensity, a sense, most notably in Beethoven's Op 110 and Schubert's B flat Sonata, of the heavenly and transcendent. There is true exultance at the close of both sonatas, in music which provided a profound solace in the aftermath of Pressler's escape from Nazi Germany, when he remained traumatised by bewilderment and pain. His performance of *Estampes* is gently chiming and caressing in 'Pagodes' and a far cry from a more clear-sighted if often pedestrian French wisdom. His Chopin, too, particularly the C sharp minor Nocturne, is enviably sensitive, making it hardly surprising that he has little time for the many immaculate, note-perfect but ultimately sterile competition-groomed performances of today. Beautifully and simply filmed, this DVD is a classic tribute to a great artist still active in the autumn of his career, and with only a passing and marginal frailty to suggest his age. **Bryce Morrison**

'Latino'

Barrios Mangoré *Una limosna por el amor de Dios*.

Un sueño en la floresta **Brouwer** Un día de noviembre **Cardoso** Milonga **Dyens** Tango en skaí **Farrés** Quizás, quizás, quizás **Gardel** Por una cabeza **Morel** Danza brasileira **Piazzolla** Libertango. Oblivion **Ponce** Chanson (Andante). Scherzino mexicano **Rodríguez** La cumparsita **Sávio** Batucada **Villa-Lobos** Mazurka-Chôro. Prelude No 1

Miloš Karadaglić *pf* with **Studio Orchestra of the European Philharmonic** / **Christoph Israel** DG © 479 0063GH (61' • DDD)



South American theme for Karadaglić's second DG disc

'Let's just hope his next release gives us something to really sink our teeth into', I wrote after Miloš Karadaglić's debut disc for DG (6/11). And the only thing you'll be sinking your teeth into is the stem of a rose as you tango your way across the living room to the familiar strains of Piazzolla's *Libertango*, Gardel and Le Pera's *Por una cabeza*, Rodríguez's *La cumparsita* and Farrés's *Quizás, quizás, quizás* in lush arrangements for guitar and strings, the latter supplied by the excellent orchestra.

Even most of the works for solo guitar have been recorded umpteen times before – though not necessarily better; Karadaglić is a guitarist of superior musical and technical gifts who allows his personality to sing through the music with taste and intelligence. That being said, the target audience for 'Latino' isn't guitar nerds – not that there isn't much to enjoy here for the

most discerning aficionados, such as a fresh, sensitive account of Barrios's *Una limosna por el amor de Dios* and a very sexy 'Mazurka-Chôro' from the *Suite populaire brésilienne* by Villa-Lobos. No, it's more those music lovers who inhabit the periphery of the classical guitar repertoire and maybe own a recording of Rodrigo's *Concierto de Aranjuez* and a couple of John Williams recital LPs from the 1970s.

But 'Latino' is just so good that it deserves the widest possible audience. And, if the truth were to be known, I loved every minute of it.

William Yeoman

'Sketches of Mexico'

Oliva *Veinte estampas de México*

Ponce *Seis Canciones mexicanas*

Morgan Szymanski *gtr*

Sarabande © SARACD004 (65' • DDD)



Szymanski conjures homeland tribute both sonic and visual

UK-based Mexican guitarist Morgan Szymanski has already shown himself to be a gifted musical collaborator – witness his work with Machacha, the ensemble he formed in 2006. But teaming up with a group of visual artists is something else altogether. Thankfully, the results are just as satisfying.

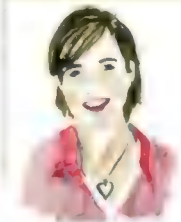
The musical content of Szymanski's stylishly packaged new solo recording, 'Sketches of Mexico', comprises the world premiere recording of Mexican guitarist/composer Julio César Oliva's *Veinte estampas de México* ('Twenty Mexican Sketches') and six *Canciones mexicanas* by Manuel Ponce.

To complement each of Oliva's 'sketches' of various Mexican locales, including the Yucatán peninsula, El Tepeyac, the lagoons of Montebello, Tijuana and of course Mexico City, artists from the UK, Mexico, Portugal and China have provided visual interpretations in various media. The artworks are reproduced one to a page; all are accompanied by a short description of the geographical location which inspired the original music. As such, the booklet-note feels more like an exhibition catalogue – but in a good way. Like Oliva's evocative, dance- and song-inflected music, the artworks are highly attractive, if variable in quality: among the better are *Atardecer* ('Dusk') by Siegrid Weise, Jane Williams's *Jaranas* and Salvador López's *Puerto Vallarta*.

What is beyond criticism is Szymanski's playing, which is of the highest order. One has only to listen to the sweet-toned *cantabile* of 'La Zona del Silencio', the pellucid fluency of 'Río Grijalva' or the complex colouristic palette Szymanski brings to Ponce's masterful miniatures. All in all, 'Sketches of Mexico' is a gorgeous and original tribute to Szymanski's homeland, its artists and its music.

William Yeoman

Vocal



Caroline Gill reviews Mouton from the Brabant Ensemble:
'The music never becomes boring and the sound stays luminously beautiful throughout'

► REVIEW ON PAGE 78



David Patrick Stearns on Miah Persson live at the Wigmore Hall:
'So beautiful is her enunciation that you could take phonetic dictation from it'

► REVIEW ON PAGE 79

JS Bach

St John Passion, BWV245 (1725 version)

Frans Fiselier *bass-bar* Christen Machteld Baumanns *sop*

Maarten Engeltjes *countertenor* Marcel Beekman *ten*

Mattijs van de Woerd *bass* La Furia; Concerto

d'Amsterdam / Nico van der Meel *ten* Evangelist

Quintone © ② Q08001/2 (109' • DDD • T)

JS Bach

St John Passion, BWV245 (1724 version)

Jan Kobow *ten* Evangelist Stephan MacLeod *bass*

Christus Les Voix Baroques; Arion Baroque Orchestra /

Alexander Weimann

ATMA Classique © ② ACD2 2611 (106' • DDD • T/t)



1724 and 1725 St John Passions from Montreal and Amsterdam respectively. The *St John Passion* was one of Bach's most ambitious undertakings soon after arriving in Leipzig in 1723 but the composer never quite rested on a final proof. By the end of the decade, three performances had produced three different versions – and a fourth was to follow over 20 years later, a text which represents today's 'liber usualis' minus a few of Bach's miscellaneous afterthoughts.

Two new readings advocate the work in both its most radical and established guises, the former from Nico van der Meel as Evangelist-director. He explores the vicissitudes of the 1725 – which have become especially popular in recent years, notably in recordings by Peter Neumann and Philippe Herreweghe. For the uninitiated, it takes some acclimatisation to forego the visceral incantation of the great 'Herr, unser Herrscher' for the panache of the great chorale fantasy 'O Mensch bewein', identical to the movement which closes Part 1 of the *St Matthew* in all but key.

Making up for the more reflective opening is the imminent additional material, the arias 'Himmel reisse' and 'Zerschmettert mich', drawn from Bach's repository of 'mutant opera' (as Sir John Eliot Gardiner calls it): both unflinching in theatrical immediacy and invention. Self-flagellation ('on the way to the cross, I shall graze on thy thorns') and the crushing remorse after Peter's

denial are radically interpolated into the familiar landscape.

Van der Meel is a seasoned Bachian and he guides us with unselfregarding aplomb, though this is ultimately a safe and relatively uneventful reading of a version which requires rather more purpose. The Evangelism is deftly pointed but observational rather than inhabited. Marcel Beekman's tenor is a versatile and notable instrument (as is Mattijs van de Woerd in a cultivated 'Eilt') but the pick of the crop is the ever-improving Maarten Engeltjes, whose 'Es ist vollbracht' is a genuinely affecting set piece enhanced by fine gamba-playing. Less consistent is the vocal consort, La Furia, whose chorales are genial but *turba* sequences decidedly the half-hearted bawling of a rent-a-crowd.

A more illuminating and projected *St John* (here in its standard and better balanced 1724 version) comes from the Canadian Les Voix Baroques, under Alexander Weimann, whose soloists step out from a 12-piece choir to create a strikingly engaging dialogue between Evangelists and the dramatis personae, and to perform the arias in a work where theological interpretation is so extraordinarily offset against the narrative. Success is partly achieved through a superior and far more emotionally intense recorded sound; if perhaps just too close for the stridency of Matthew White's 'Von den Stricken', it well serves Jan Kobow's involving and rich-hued Evangelist.

The trade-off for the two 'scenas' which Bach added for Good Friday 1725 means forfeiting 'Ach mein Sinn' and 'Erwäge'. Listening back-to-back to both allows us to view clearly how Bach's compositional ambition in the later score (certainly in terms of singularly extravagant gesture) leads to a kind of affective disunity. Neither of these masterpieces should surely be jettisoned? And what a loss this electrifying performance of 'Ach mein Sinn' from Jeremy Budd would be to Weimann's plan of contemplative angst – one which the director marshals seamlessly into Stephan MacLeod's admirable 'Betrachte' and organically towards a nobly conceived if oddly blended 'Ruht wohl'.

Of recent releases, Gardiner's recording (SDG) has a kind of ritualised and glowing

potency, with supreme technical delivery, elevating the work like few others. The ATMA disc, in contrast, has a luminous and gently penetrating emotional impact (with one of the most moving accounts of 'Es ist vollbracht' in recent years from Meg Bragle). The instruments are discreet and yet integral, and the quality of production adds up to a very significant, incrementally impressive new reading. **Jonathan Freeman-Attwood**

Selected comparisons:

P Neumann (9/00) (DABR) MDG332 0983-2

Herreweghe (12/01) (HARM) HMC90 1748/9

Gardiner (7/11) (SDG) SDG712

JS Bach

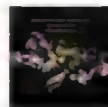
Mass in B minor, BWV232

Dorothee Mields, Hana Blažiková *sops* Damien Guillon

countertenor Thomas Hobbs *ten* Peter Kooij *bass*

Collegium Vocale, Ghent / Philippe Herreweghe

PHI © ② LPH004 (101' • DDD)



Herreweghe's own label hosts his third B minor Mass

This is Philippe Herreweghe's third commercial recording of the Mass in B minor in 23 years and, unlike many conductors who serially return to cornerstone pieces, his finest to date. Collegium Vocale Gent established its Bachian credentials for glowing homogeneous restraint and soft-hued refinement in the 1988 reading (for Virgin), only to pursue a form of routine luxuriance in their Harmonia Mundi version eight years later.

If the original Virgin recording has its share of vocal and instrumental wrinkles, much of its durable delicacy and poise returns in the new account, especially in capturing the 'daily bread' of the ritual narrative of the Mass with luminosity of line; now, the stakes are considerably higher and there is a maturity in the vision which is immediately evident in the opening 'Kyrie'. It's a performance of beautifully calibrated dynamics, inner elegance and promising future mysteries.

Surveying the complete discography of the Mass reveals how few performances transport the listener into each contained world – be it a *Gloria* or 'Crucifixus' – while managing the long-term challenge of an evolving, not



PHOTOGRAPHY: N. BARUCH

Paradise found: Geoffroy Jordain conducts Dubois (see page 75)

driven momentum. Bach may have assembled the Mass as a single entity in his final years but this is a work which the composer left without a performance 'in toto', and perhaps not even one 'in mind'. A lot is left to judicious imagination.

Herreweghe is a master of when to fill the sails and when to trim them, especially in the large ensemble movements but also across the piece. The 'Et in terra pax' may appear a little laid-back compared to the driven intensity (in very different ways) of Andrew Parrott and Karl Richter but as the huge *Gloria* unfolds, the kaleidoscope of formal and textural possibility always allows for special devotional intimacies to emerge. The 'Domine Deus' is, apart from an intermittently flat Dorothee Mields, an exquisite example of how the interweaving worlds of instruments and voices create a 'oneness' of Father and Son.

Atmosphere is ultimately what places Herreweghe's new reading in the higher echelons. The solo set pieces may not all reach the same high level of the wonderfully rich 'Quoniam' (the bassoons sounding like grumpy old men), a radiant 'Et in Spiritum' from the perennial Peter Kooij and Thomas Hobbs's touching *Benedictus* but most compel the listener to discern, at the very least, the multi-layered musical, liturgical and expressive depth of Bach's supreme masterpiece. The opening 'Credo' is portrayed as a mathematical proof, a

timeless constellation of glistening *canti firmi*, while the 'Et incarnatus' and 'Crucifixus' see Herreweghe in his element, juxtaposing the purple of the Roman rite with the adopted figural mysteries of his indigenous forbears. The 'Confiteor' is irresistible.

This account is one of the most consistent in recent years, though without quite the engaging exultance (the volley of D major choruses from the 'Et expecto' are only impressively efficient), risk and poetic ambition of Frans Brüggen's first recording (for Philips). Brüggen sprinkles magic especially in his handling of the registral connections between movements and some brilliant inspirational turns. While the balance favours the instruments for him, they can seem subdued for Herreweghe or non-existent: no list of players in the booklet is something of travesty in the circumstances of this great ensemble piece.

Jonathan Freeman-Attwood

Selected comparison:

Herreweghe (8/89*) (VIRG) 693197-2

Brüggen (2/90*) (DECC) 480 0098

Beethoven

Missa solemnis, Op 123

Heather Harper *sop* **Julia Hamari** *contr* **Sven Olof Eliasson** *ten* **Peter Meven** *bass* **Cologne Radio Choir and Symphony Orchestra / William Steinberg**

ICA Classics © ICAC5054 (74' • ADD)

Recorded live at the Funkhaus, Cologne, June 1973

Beethoven

Missa solemnis, Op 123

Anne Schwanewilms *sop* **Annette Jahns** *mez*

Nikolai Schukoff *ten* **Dietrich Henschel** *bass*

London Philharmonic Choir and Orchestra /

Christoph Eschenbach

LPO © LPO0061 (80' • DDD • T/D)

Recorded live at the Royal Festival Hall, London, October 2008



35 years separate Missae solemnes live in Cologne and London

Here are two live versions of Beethoven's mighty work, recorded 35 years apart. The Cologne performance was taped in a studio; the London one comes from the Festival Hall. I couldn't detect any audience noise on either disc – if indeed there was an audience in Cologne – and there is no applause.

William Steinberg is best known for his fine work with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra but he is no less impressive with the radio orchestra of his home town. In his early years he was an assistant to Klemperer, and there's more than a touch of Klemperer granite in this performance. Right from the start you feel that all will be well. The soloists are rather forwardly placed, but that does highlight Heather Harper's radiant soprano (as well as,

unfortunately, Sven Olof Eliasson's uningratiating tenor). Christoph Eschenbach starts the *Kyrie* well, too, but the choir's *crescendo* before the reprise sounds contrived.

In Steinberg's *Gloria*, the choir's accent on 'hominibus' is just right: quiet, not overdone. The fugal 'in gloria Dei' is *ben marcato*, as Beethoven instructs, with an irresistibly over-the-top contribution from the horns. Eschenbach scores with the finely shaped phrasing of his violas and cellos in the introduction to the 'Gratias agimus' and the delicate woodwind lead-in to 'Qui tollis'. But the entry of the chorus tenors at 'Quoniam tu solus' is a bit of a shock: I'm afraid I was put in mind of Rossini's description of Gilbert Duprez's top C as 'the squawk of a capon having its throat cut'.

The LPC tenors redeem themselves with their whispered 'Et incarnatus est' and a less strangled 'Et resurrexit'. Earlier on, though, Eschenbach loses momentum by slowing up before 'qui propter nos homines', whereas Steinberg manages the join seamlessly. Steinberg hammers out 'consubstantialem Patri' in fine style, and he finds an analogue in the *staccato* repetitions of 'et vitam venturi'.

Honours are pretty well even in the *Sanctus*, though Eschenbach's chorus don't quite find the mystery in the muttered *mezza voce* phrases that follow the solo quartet. The violin solo in the *Benedictus* is ravishingly played by Wolfgang Marschner for Steinberg and Pieter Schoeman for Eschenbach: if I prefer the former it's because of Steinberg's slightly faster, flowing tempo. Peter Meven intones the opening to the *Agnus Dei* with gravitas; Dietrich Henschel makes an equally strong impression despite his lighter tone. But whereas Steinberg gently applies the brakes, Eschenbach really drags out the closing bars: a good example of more being less.

A clear preference for Steinberg, then; but after playing these discs I went back to Klemperer and the Philharmonia at the Festival Hall in 1963. Now there's a recording for your desert island. **Richard Lawrence**

Selected comparison:

Philb Orch, Klemperer (TEST) SBT1408

Blackburn

Duluth Harbor Serenade^a. Ghostly Psalms^b.

Gospel Jihad^c

^aDozens of Citizens of Duluth, Minnesota;

^bVarious artists including ^cChoir of Clare College,

Cambridge / Tim Brown

Innova © INNOVA246 (64' • DDD)



Innova profiles its British-born composing label manager

Everyone likes a composer with an unusual back story, and Philip Blackburn's is more unusual than most. Born in Cambridge in 1962,

Blackburn studied as a choral scholar at Clare College before relocating to the US, where encounters with experimentalists such as Pauline Oliveros and Harry Partch turned his assumptions about music upside down. Blackburn now oversees the Partch archive and runs the Innova label, which releases this latest disc dedicated to his work.

But Blackburn hasn't rejected his English choral past – instead, he's devised composition strategies to make all the associations that come with English choral music co-exist with his 'American' side. As he persuasively puts it, 'We spend more time filtering out sounds than we do being aware of them. Result: more aural clutter, more environmental pollution, more insensitivity to others and ourselves. How can I help myself and others practise listening and reclaim our soundscape? I compose to make us aware of our own composing.'

And so the disc opens with *Duluth Harbour Serenade* (2011), an eight-minute snatch of sound art that uses microphones like a movie camera to slowly zoom in, and around, Duluth Harbour during Labor Day celebrations. Celebratory music bounces against the harbour's infrastructure: ship horns, steam trains and the groaning of the bridge rising; bounces into babbling conversation and song. By filtering everyday sounds, we engage in the practice of listening.

At the other end of the scale is *Gospel Jihad* (2010), performed with luminous precision by the choir of Blackburn's alma mater; and in between sits *Ghostly Psalms*, a 50-minute multimedia work some 20 years in the planning. Dreamt into being via a classic anxiety dream in which he followed a clear trickle of water through a desert to find an abbey in a medieval village where a choir sang, this trippy, occasionally apocalyptic work knocks reality sideways. Intimate vocal soliloquies wrestle free from walls of sustained choral and string drones that morph and change with the (anti)logic of a dream's unruly narrative. **Philip Clark**

T-L Bourgeois

Les Sirènes. Borée. Hippomène.

Psiché. Zéphire et Flore

Carolyn Sampson *sop* Le Concert Lorrain

Carus © CARUS83 374 (72' • DDD)



Five cantatas from a restless spirit of 18th-century France

'Who he?' you may well ask of Thomas-Louis Bourgeois (1676-1750), a name known only the most avid of French Baroque aficionados. Born in Hainault, he began his career as *maître de musique* at Strasbourg Cathedral, sang as an haute-contre (high tenor) at the Paris Opéra, and then led something of a peripatetic existence before finally returning to Paris,

where he died in poverty and obscurity. A brief biographical entry in *Le Parnasse François* of 1755 notes, laconically, that 'his restless spirit' (*inconstance*) prevented him from fully realising his talents.

In the early decades of the 18th century, when his reputation was at its height, Bourgeois was famed for his chamber cantatas, a genre popularised by the works of Jean-Baptiste Morin. Responding to the new Parisian vogue for Italian music, the five cantatas recorded here combine an Italianate lyrical warmth and brilliance with Gallic grace and fastidiousness of declamation. All are based on lustful episodes in Greek mythology, sanitised and prettified for the Age of Reason (Boreas's rape of Oreithyia, for instance, here becomes unthreatening consensual sex). While the default setting is pastoral charm, with the voice often in colloquy with the amorous warbling flute, Bourgeois conjures moments of vivid drama, especially in *Borée* and in the highly expressive recitatives for the lovelorn Psyche.

In fresh, free voice, Carolyn Sampson does Bourgeois proud. She understands that airy grace and languid sensuality are of the essence, but never falls into the trap of winsomeness. Singing in clear French, she phrases alluringly (not least in Psyche's tender supplication to Cupid), points key words without exaggeration and relishes the opportunities for dramatisation: say, in the tempest unleashed by Boreas, abetted by frenetically strumming continuo, or the dialogue between capricious Cupid and distraught Psyche. Le Concert Lorrain are inventive, stylistically acute collaborators, with Alexis Kossenko beguiling in the many flute obbligatos. While Bourgeois's cantatas may not quite rival Rameau's or Clérambault's in melodic and harmonic piquancy, in such delectable performances they make a very welcome discovery. **Richard Wigmore**

Buxtehude

Membra Jesu nostri, BuxWV75.

Fried- und Freudenreiche Hinfahrt, BuxWV76

La Petite Bande / Sigiswald Kuijken *vc da spalla*

Accent © ACC24243 (65' • DDD)



Kuijken directs Membra Jesu Nostri from his shoulder cello

This is the 16th version of *Membra Jesu nostri* (1680) to have come my way on CD, which must make Buxtehude's cycle of seven short cantatas one of the most frequently recorded sacred works of the 17th century. Sigiswald Kuijken continues to be a relentless pioneer of Baroque music practice; in recent years he has embraced the one-voice-per-part approach to Bach's church music and has also reappraised several cornerstones of Baroque repertoire using a violoncello da spalla (ie a 'shoulder' cello). Both elements are evident in La Petite

Bande's performance of *Membra Jesu nostri*. The sonatas for two violins and basso continuo that commence each cantata are played with an unusual lightness of touch (Kuijken playing the shoulder cello); aria-like passages are accompanied only by Benjamin Alard's sensitive organ continuo-playing.

The *Sonata in tremulo* ('Ad genua') is played softly and intelligently but the blend and tuning of the choral quintet in 'Ad ubera portabimini' is marred by pinched and anaemic singing from Ann-Katrin Schenck (although she sings the 'Klag-Lied' in BuxWV76 marvellously). The chorus 'Quid sunt plagae' ('Ad manus') has poetic solemnity but elsewhere singers tend to be adequate rather than eloquent, and 'Sicut modo geniti' ('Ad pectus') and other key moments feel perfunctory rather than moving. Other single-voice-per-part versions by The Sixteen, Cantus Cölln, Les Voix Baroques and the Netherlands Bach Society communicate the penitential words with warmer sentimentality.

David Vickers

Membra Jesu nostri – selected comparisons:

Sixteen, Christophers (6/01*) (CORO) CORI 6082

Cantus Cölln, Jungbühel (6/06) (HARM) HMC90 1912

Netherlands Bach Society, Veldboven

(6/06) (CHNN) CCSSA24006

Voix Baroques, Weimann (A107) (ATMA) ACD2 2563

Caldara - Handel

'Carmelite Vespers 1709'

Caldara *Haec est regina virginum. Laetatus sum. Te decus virgineum* **Handel** *Saevia tellus*, HWV240.

Dixit Dominus, HWV232. *Salve regina*, HWV241

Roberta Invernizzi, Robin Johannsen *sops* **Martin Oro**

countertenor **Markus Brutscher** *ten* **Antonio Abete** *bass*

Academia Montis Regalis / Alessandro De Marchi

Deutsche Harmonia Mundi ⑤ ② 88691 92604-2

(98' • DDD)



De Marchi reimagines a Handel-Caldara Vespers

In the 1980s there was a fashion for constructing Handel's Italian-period church music into a so-called 'Carmelite Vespers', such as the landmark recording by Andrew Parrott (Virgin, 6/89*) based on diligent research including all necessary plainchants and Vespers texts in a plausible liturgical order. However, some facts are often misunderstood: the 22-year-old Handel was commissioned to compose five pieces for the Vespers feasts of the Blessed Virgin of Mount Carmel on July 15 and 16, 1707, at the tiny Roman church of Santa Maria di Montesanto, but music by other composers was probably used too, so there was never any such thing as a 'Handel Vespers'. Moreover, *Dixit Dominus* and *Salve regina* were both composed earlier, for occasions unconnected to the Carmelite feasts, so their conjectural inclusion in modern reconstructions is without historical foundation. Nevertheless,

both are included in Alessandro De Marchi's conceptual recording, which imagines that in 1709 some of Handel's music might have been revived alongside new contributions from the Venetian composer Caldara who, during his Roman period (1708-16), wrote settings of two Carmelite antiphon texts that Handel had used in 1707 (*Haec est regina virginum* and *Te Decus virgineum*).

DHM's external packaging claims this is a 'reconstruction' of an actual Vespers service 'as performed' in 1709 but such marketing is fundamentally untrue. De Marchi's 100-minute programme is obviously designed as a concert-hall set piece flanked at each end by brief plainchants; neither its content nor sequence are remotely close to a bona fide Vespers: the obligatory psalms 'Laudate pueri' and 'Nisi Dominus' are omitted (Handel composed settings of both for the Carmelites) and *Dixit Dominus* does not occupy its correct early liturgical position but is performed towards the end. Solecisms are de rigueur for De Marchi's Handel interpretations: the relentlessly choppy playing of *Academia Montis Regalis* makes the opening chorus of *Dixit Dominus* inarticulately clumsy; the soprano duet 'De torrente' is ruined by clunking harpsichord crashing in to accompany the men's intonations.

Anachronistic harp, harpsichord and two theorbos clutter up the texture of *Salve regina* (Caldara is co-credited bizarrely as its composer). The motet *Saevia tellus* is the only one of Handel's five authentic Carmelite pieces included; the flamboyant opening aria is gutsily done, 'O nox dulcis' is taken very slowly and quietly to rapturous effect but Roberta Invernizzi's sparkling coloratura in the 'Alleluia' is marred by De Marchi's frantic rushing and unpleasant orchestral trill on the final chord. Careless presentation, superficial marketing and crass musicianship make this a curate's egg; but it is fascinating to hear decent performances of Caldara's two antiphons and psalm *Laetatus sum*. **David Vickers**

Dubois

Le Paradis perdu

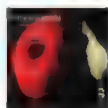
Chantal Santon *sop* **Jennifer Borghi** *mez* **Cyrille**

Dubois, Mathias Vidal *tens* **Alain Buet** *bass* **Aurélien**

Richard *pf* **Les Solistes des Siècles; Les Cris de Paris /**

Geoffroy Jourdain

Aparté ⑤ ② AP030 (96' • DDD)



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The sheer standard of late-19th-century prize-winning French music re-emerging on record under the auspices of Venice's Palazzetto Bru Zane Centre reminds one, in a nicer possible way, of Mahler's outcry from his applicants' in-tray at the Vienna Court Opera: 'Nowadays every cobbler can orchestrate to perfection.'



Stephen Bell, horn
Britten Sinfonia, dir. **Jaqueline Shave**

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Nocturne Op.60

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Andrew Clements, *The Guardian*, 26 June 2009

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Gramophone Classical Music Guide 2012

Théodore Dubois (1837–1924) had the standard French near A-list career of his time – organist, choirmaster, teacher and composer. His career constantly touched on ‘grand’ contemporaries. Taught by Ambroise Thomas, he succeeded Franck at Sainte-Clotilde and Saint-Saëns at the Madeleine to the two big Paris church appointments of the day and became director of the Paris Conservatoire on the death of Thomas. He taught Dukas, Magnard, Ropartz and Schmitt, and resigned conveniently just before the Conservatoire refused to award one Maurice Ravel the Prix de Rome in 1905.

What little of Dubois’s oeuvre that is still performed is religious but his obsession was for opera. This interest audibly adds pace and impact to his 1878 setting of Milton’s poem. The text is by Édouard Blau, who wrote *Le Cid* and *Werther* for Massenet and *Le roi d’Ys* for Lalo – and was fond enough of his contribution here to demand half of Dubois’s Prix de Paris award. Blau’s libretto and Dubois’s dramatic and (as regards the chorus) carefully terraced vocal setting have the soloists and choir ‘play’ Eve, Adam, Satan, the Archangel and the other characters more like an opera than a set concert work.

The result, as performed here, sounds like more harmonically adventurous Gounod. It’s utterly professional and rich in good tunes, and I suspect that, when the music sounds inappropriately charming, it’s the fault of the edition used here. As *Le Paradis perdu* only exists now in vocal score, what we have here is described by the booklet as ‘a modern chamber version for string quintet, wind quintet and piano’. Lack of a full orchestration certainly contributes to a frustrating minimalism in the more devilish later pages of Parts 3 (‘Paradise – The Temptation’) and 4 (‘The Judgement’); a sawing string quintet and the odd wind toot is not the most potent carrier of Satan’s wrath.

As in the Prix de Rome releases in the Palazzetto Bru Zane series, the recording is prepared and delivered with impressive commitment. But the performing edition – sounding occasionally like a reinvocation of Rossini’s *Petite Messe solennelle* – does not always seem adequate for Dubois and Blau’s drama.

Mike Ashman

Handel

Alceste, HWV45

Lucy Crowe *sop* Benjamin Hulett *ten*

Andrew Foster-Williams *bass-bar*

Early Opera Company / Christian Curnyn

Chandos Chaconne © CHAN0788 (63' • DDD • T/t)



Curnyn’s EOC restores rare Handel incidental music

Covent Garden director John Rich evidently overreached himself when, in 1749, he planned

Alceste – play by Tobias Smollett, modelled on Euripides, incidental music by Handel – as a multimedia extravaganza, with separate casts of singers and actors, and lavish scenery by Giovanni Servandoni. Soon after rehearsals began the project was aborted, probably because Rich had taken fright at the mounting costs, though Smollett’s famously short temper may have played its part. Never one to waste a good tune, Handel recycled most of the numbers the following year in the allegorical ode *The Choice of Hercules*. While this gets an occasional airing, the original *Alceste* music is a serious Handelian rarity: I can trace just two previous recordings, including a fine one from Christopher Hogwood (L’Oiseau Lyre, 12/98), both of which have slipped out of the catalogue.

The arias and choruses for assorted gods, muses, sirens and shades, plus instrumental numbers (among them an impressive, Gallic-style *Passacaille* filched from the opera *Radamisto*), are in Handel’s most beguiling vein, sometimes with a distinct whiff of Purcell: say, in the voluptuously melancholy chorus ‘Thrice happy who in life excel’, and the tenor aria ‘Tune your harps’. Other highlights include the chic gavotte for soprano and chorus ‘Still caressing’ – first cousin to Semele’s ‘Endless pleasure’ – and the muse Calliope’s lulling ‘Gentle Morpheus’, exquisitely scored for four-part strings.

On this new recording Christian Curnyn and his trim period band give full value to the music’s sensuous charm, phrasing alluringly in the slower numbers and keeping the rhythms lithe and springy. Bass-lines are always vitally shaped. The 12-strong chorus sings with youthful freshness and the three soloists are ideally chosen. Andrew-Foster Williams is incisive without bluster in Charon’s balefully cheerful ‘Ye fleeting shades’. Benjamin Hulett is both mellifluous and athletic in his three arias, while Lucy Crowe displays her nimble coloratura technique in the frolicking ‘Come fancy’, and brings a limpid purity of line to ‘Gentle Morpheus’. First-rate Chandos sound and presentation, with a stimulating essay from David Vickers, complete an hour of hedonistic Handelian delight. **Richard Wigmore**

Martines

‘Il primo amore’

Ouverture in C. Cantata, ‘Il primo amore’^a.

Harpichord Concerto in E. Harpichord Sonata

in A. Aria, ‘Berenice, ah che fai?’^a

^aNuria Rial *sop* La Floridiana / Nicoleta Paraschivescu

Deutsche Harmonia Mundi © 88697 88579-2

(65' • DDD • T/t)



Assorted works from the ‘most excellent contapuntist’

Marianna Martines: a Spanish surname, but her father had moved from Naples to Vienna,

where he was in the service of the papal nuncio. Marianna was born in Vienna in 1744 and she died there in 1812 but she certainly had Neapolitan connections: she was a protégée of Metastasio and a pupil of Hasse, Porpora and Bonno; she was also taught by the young Haydn, who was at the time a kind of dogsbody to Porpora. Dr Burney met her at Metastasio’s apartment in 1772 and was greatly impressed by her talents as composer, singer and harpsichord-player: ‘She sung two airs of her own composition...which she accompanied on the harpsichord, in a very judicious and masterly manner; and, in playing the ritornels, I could discover a very brilliant finger...She...is a most excellent contrapuntist.’

All the pieces but one on this charming disc were composed when Martines was in her twenties. The earliest are the works for harpsichord. The slow movement of the Sonata is a plaintive aria, just melody and bass. The Concerto begins with a rising triad, as in Bach’s E major Violin Concerto; so too does the Overture, a three-movement sinfonia. This work is scored for wind as well as strings: both are cheerful examples of the new *galant* style. *Il primo amore*, a cantata written in 1778, consists of two arias, each preceded by an *accompagnato* recitative. It’s unpretentiously tuneful, with coloratura passages; but for real depth, turn to *Berenice, ah che fai?*. This is a scena to the Metastasio text that Haydn was to set later. The dramatic interplay of voice and strings in the opening recitative is astonishingly accomplished.

Nicoleta Paraschivescu and her little band of woodwind, horns and single strings are powerful advocates and Nuria Rial is splendidly passionate in the scena. Buy the disc: you won’t regret it. **Richard Lawrence**

Monteverdi

‘Selva morale e spirituale, Vol 2’

Laudate Dominum (terzo). Confirtebor tibi Domine

(primo). O ciechi, ciechi. Jubilet tota civitas. Messa

da cappella a 4. Deus tuorum militum (secondo).

Sanctorum meritis (primo). Crucifixus. Laudate

Dominum in sanctis eius. Et iterum venturus est.

Ab aeterno ordinata sum. Dixit Dominus (primo)

The Sixteen / Harry Christophers

Coro © COR16101 (71' • DDD • T/t)



The Sixteen in second volume of the *Selva morale e spirituale*

Selva morale e spirituale (Venice, 1641) is Monteverdi’s largest publication of diverse sacred compositions. Only a few artists have recorded something like the complete ‘moral and spiritual forest’ but Harry Christophers is sensibly spreading his survey across several independent volumes that each structure an assortment of pieces into a thoughtfully contoured programme (which recording the

entire publication in its original sequence would certainly not).

Vol 2 covers the most modern and old-fashioned compositions the elderly Monteverdi selected. Twenty singers join together in a shaped performance of an *a cappella* four-part Mass in the *stile antico*, whereas elaborate *concertato* psalms such as 'Confitebor tibi Domine (primo)' are sung by just eight singers, with high tenors sailing smoothly on the alto lines; choral refrains are supple, solos are sung eloquently and the Latin texts are communicated crisply. Monteverdi's suggestion that 'Dixit Dominus (primo)' can feature trombones is ignored; Christophers prefers minimal instrumental scoring. An assured quintet of voices does not quite realise the dramatic possibilities offered by the *vanitas* madrigal 'O ciechi, ciechi' (adapted from verses by Petrarch), but theatricality is to be found in bass Stuart Young's plunging low notes in the extraordinary solo motet 'Ab aeterno ordinata sum'; violinists Walter Reiter and Simon Jones play compassionately in dialogue with Grace Davidson's gentle singing in the hymn 'Sanctorum meritis (primo)' and the continuo-playing of David Miller (chitarrone), Frances Kelly (harp) and Alastair Ross (keyboards) proves that imaginative colour need not be devoid of subtlety. **David Vickers**

Mouton

Missa Tu es Petrus. Nesciens mater. Ave Maria, gemma virginum. Exsultet coniubilando. Verbum bonum et suave. Bona vita, bona refectio. Factum est silentium

Brabant Ensemble / Stephen Rice

Hyperion © CDA67933 (66' • DDD • T/t)



Measured acoustic for Brabant portrait of Willaert's teacher

One of the most satisfying things about watching and listening to the Brabant Ensemble evolve over the last decade has been to hear its sound become more and more easily identifiable: as with, say, The Sixteen, a few bars will usually be enough. But whereas with some groups that identity comes only from the sound, the Brabants can have an attribution pinned on them as much by the beauty of their phrasing. The way in which Stephen Rice moulds his musical arguments is uniquely detailed and quietly thoughtful, aided at least in part by the fact that this respected musicologist works from his own specially produced editions (although this does beg the question directly to him: where have the delicious false relations in *Nesciens mater* gone?).

Being led so unobtrusively through the musical maze of the pieces on this disc in this way completely avoids the risk so common to single-composer discs of the slightly obscure polyphony: the music never becomes boring

and the sound, which is at its most crystalline in one-to-a-part performance and which sometimes teeters on the edge of sounding too big with this 16-voice group, never hardens into relentlessness but stays luminously beautiful throughout. The blend of the ensemble is too warm for that, too – especially when Rice has opted for an acoustic that is yielding but not as distractingly swimmy as the chapel of Merton College that many Oxford-based groups can sometimes misguidedly choose. **Caroline Gill**

Mozart

Mass No 17, 'Missa solemnis', K337. Regina caeli, K108. Vesperae de Dominica, K321

Lynda Russell sop **Lina Markeby** mez **James Oxley** ten

David Wilson-Johnson bar **Simon Johnson** org

St Paul's Cathedral Choir; St Paul's Mozart Orchestra /

Andrew Carwood

Hyperion © CDA67921 (69' • DDD • T/t)



Choice Masses for the boys and men of St Paul's Cathedral

This is the latest in a small flurry of Mozart Mass recordings with boy trebles. However, rather than tape the ever-popular *Coronation* Mass, K317, Andrew Carwood and the Choir of St Paul's Cathedral opt for its successor, the last of Mozart's Salzburg Masses, which was also formerly referred to as a 'Coronation' Mass following its use (by Salieri, no less) at the Imperial coronations of the early 1790s. In fact it's a sort of 'anti-*Coronation*' Mass: in place of its sister-work's celebratory outlook, Mozart opts for darker colours; it's chorally led rather than a showpiece for the soloists; and, most remarkably, at the *Benedictus*, in place of the soprano's light *allegretto* in the earlier work, Mozart writes an austere, forbidding fugue. This is the work that marks Mozart's imminent break with Salzburg and points to the church-music experiments of his Vienna decade.

The *Vesperae de Domenica*, too, is less well known than its later counterpart, the *Vesperae solennes de Confessore*. That work's two outstanding movements, the beautiful, aria-like 'Laudate Dominum' and the neo-Baroque fugal 'Laudate pueri', are replaced here, respectively, by a coloratura number with obbligato organ and a flowing canonic outpouring.

The recording was made not in the cavernous acoustic of St Paul's but 15 minutes' walk away in St Giles Cripplegate. The boys and men of the choir blend well with the 40-strong orchestra and display their strength and security especially in the early *Regina coeli*, K108 (in the 'Ora pro nobis' of which soprano Lynda Russell has a starring moment). Full marks for the performances in general; full marks also to Carwood and St Paul's for headlining with this

rarely performed Mass rather than the ubiquitous K317 – and for coupling it with the similarly rare K321 Vespers setting.

David Threasher

Shaw

Venizel. Jack Overdue. The melodies you sing. The Airmen. Over the sea. Pity the poor fighting men. The Egg-Shell. The Land of Heart's Desire. The Conjuraton. The Merry Wanderer. Bab-Lock-Hythe. Child of the flowing tide. Full fathom five. Bird or beast?. The little waves of Breffny. Come away, death. Brookland Road. Summer. The Bubble Song. The Dip. The Rivulet. I know a bank. Perilous ways. Heffle Cuckoo Fair. Old clothes and fine clothes. Over the sea with the soldier. When daisies died. At Columbine's Grave. Wood Magic. Tides. Ye banks and braes. The Accursed Wood. The World's Delight. The Banks of Allan Water. Invictus. Cuckoo **Sophie Bevan** sop **Andrew Kennedy** ten **Roderick Williams** bar **Iain Burnside** pf Delphian © DCD34105 (78' • DDD • T)



English song from the co-editor of the Oxford Book of Carols

One of the glories of the CD catalogue has been that an unknown composer backed by a devotee can get recorded. The little-known composer is Martin Shaw (1875-1958) and the enthusiast is George Odam, who has provided informative notes and full texts of the songs, not always coinciding with what is sung. Shaw wrote hymn-tunes – 'Through the night of doubt and sorrow' was a hit – and was co-editor of *Songs of Praise* and the *Oxford Book of Carols*. His overall standing was reflected when he became the first composer Britten commissioned for an Aldeburgh Festival – the first one in 1948 – and five of his church pieces were included in the 1975 festival.

There's enormous variety in these songs, written between 1914 and 1942, and all published at the time. The idiom is diatonic, solidly in the English tradition, but some poems are straightforwardly set whereas others have elaborately illustrative piano parts, like 'The Airmen', celebrating the heroes of the Battle of Britain. The poets themselves range from Shakespeare, Burns and Kipling to unknown amateurs. There are lyrical gems such as 'I know a bank' from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; light comedies such as one promoting sea-bathing; and patter-songs with precisely gauged speech rhythm. Shaw can even rise to drama where 'Black Sir Hugo broke his neck' and more seriously in WE Henley's assertion: 'I am the captain of my soul'.

This attractive selection benefits from having three excellent singers, all with good diction. With persuasive performances like these it looks as if there's a case for making room for another English song composer.

Peter Dickinson

Sommer

Sapphos Gesänge, Op 6. Odysseus. Der Fischer. König und Floh. Der Türmer singt auf der Schlosswarte. Ach neige, du Schmerzenreiche. An den Mond. Mailed. Frech und froh. Des Harfners Gesang. Mignon singt, als Engel angetan. Mignons Sehnen. Symbolum. Wonne der Wehmut. Wanderers Nachtlied

Elisabeth Kulman *mez* Bo Skovhus *bar*

Bamberg Symphony Orchestra / Sebastian Weigle

Tudor Ⓢ TUDOR7178 (70' • DDD • T/t)



Orchestral song from Wagner contemporary Hans Sommer

Born in Germany in 1837, dying in 1922, Hans Sommer saw music evolve from Schumann to Schoenberg, Wagner to Webern. A scientist and mathematician by profession, he had an innate musicality, starting to compose as a child but turning to music full-time only in his late forties. Though encouraged by progressives like Liszt and Strauss, Sommer seems to have preferred an easy-going romanticism to anything more boldly dramatic or expressionistic, and it might be significant that the one song included on this disc that hints at something more monumental is a setting of Goethe's 'Symbolum', a poem hymning the virtues of freemasonry that the leading masters of the Romantic Lied seem to have avoided.

It's when he tackles such familiar Goethe texts as 'An den Mond', 'Wanderers Nachtlied' and the Harper and Mignon songs from *Wilhelm Meister* that Sommer courts inevitable comparison with the formidable likes of Schubert and Wolf. Sadly, he has little to offer beyond a generalised, relatively bland lyricism, missing both the intensity and sublimity that Schubert and Wolf provide. The accompaniments, though sensitively scored, remain decorously subordinate, with a minimum of initial scene-setting. And even when the comparison is with a lesser figure, as with 'Der Türmer singt auf der Schlosswarte', Karl Loewe's beautifully serene setting wins the contest by a mile.

Sommer could not have hoped for more eloquent advocacy than the marvellously refined mezzo of Elisabeth Kulman, her verbal clarity and sense of line in both *Sapphos Gesänge* and the Goethe settings a joy to hear in nicely balanced recordings. Bo Skovhus, assigned the more declamatory Goethe items, can do less to disguise their musical limitations but, like Kulman, he shows a keen appreciation of texts which are archetypally Romantic in their focus on human sorrows and the joys of the natural world. **Arnold Whittall**

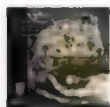
Tye

Missa Euge bone. Western Wynde Mass.

Quaesumus omnipotens et misericors Deus.

Give almes of thy goods. Christ rising. Peccavimus cum patribus nostris. Nunc dimittis

Choir of Westminster Abbey / James O'Donnell
Hyperion Ⓢ CDA67928 (74' • DDD • T/t)



Westminster Abbey Choir in Catholic and Anglican Tye

Christopher Tye was born around 1505 and, like his contemporary Thomas Tallis, he composed music for both the Anglican and the Roman Catholic rites. Not much is known about his early life, save that he was awarded a doctorate in music at Cambridge, having earlier sung as a lay clerk at King's College. In 1549 he became Master of the Choristers at Ely Cathedral, and Organist 10 years later; he probably died in 1572 or 1573.

This disc offers a good sample of Tye's music for both denominations. As was customary, the two Masses omit the *Kyrie*; but there are links between the first item, *Quaesumus omnipotens*, and the *Missa Euge bone*: for instance, 'militamus miseri' and 'ut vitorium voragine devitate' in the motet find an echo at 'Jesu Christe' in the *Gloria*. The Mass, which may have been Tye's doctoral submission, is so full of clever contrapuntal devices, including a double canon at the fifth in the *Agnus Dei*, that it's a relief to find him committing the solecism of consecutive fifths. The *Western Wynde Mass*, based on the secular song also used by Taverner and Sheppard, includes some old-fashioned melismas in the two-part writing of the *Benedictus*.

These are good, sturdy performances. If I have a criticism it is that there's a doggedness about the boy trebles that becomes wearying. Where the men sing alone, as at 'Respice in nos' in *Peccavimus cum patribus nostris*, the phrasing is much more shapely. But the simple, syllabic setting of *Give almes of thy goods* and the smoothly flowing *Nunc dimittis* are beautifully done. **Richard Lawrence**

Zelenka

Responsoria pro Hebdomada Sancta, ZWV55.

Lamentatio Ieremiae Prophetiae, ZWV53

Collegium Vocale 1704; Collegium 1704 / Václav Luks
Accent Ⓢ ACC24259 (158' • DDD • T/t)



More Zelenka from former Recording of Month winners

Collegium 1704 and its director Václav Luks have made several fine recordings of Zelenka's sacred music for Dresden's Catholic court chapel. Now they turn their attention to music written for Matins during Holy Week 1722 and 1723. The double album commences with the first of Zelenka's several *Lamentations of Jeremiah* (ZWV53), created for Maundy Thursday 1722: bass soloist Marián Krejčík gives a contoured performance, accompanied

by warmly emotive orchestral playing; it is an eloquent alternative to the smaller-scale and sensitive recording by Michael George (a Hyperion disc that also includes another two *Lamentations* for Good Friday and Easter Eve, sung by Michael Chance and John Mark Ainsley respectively – 7/91⁸).

Krejčík's sincere lamentation flows directly into the *Responsoria pro Hebdomada Sancta* (ZWV55), three sets of nine Responses that were started by Zelenka in 1722 but not completed until a year later. The Responses are diligently preceded by appropriate plainchant Lessons, supervised by tenor Hasan El-Dunia but shared between almost all of the choir's excellent male voices. During the Maundy Thursday responses, 'Tristis est anima mea' (Response II) is typical of Zelenka's potent use of contrast, with doleful passages for solo voices juxtaposed with finely crafted contrapuntal choral sections. In Response III there is poignant word-setting of poetic Biblical texts familiar to us from the epicentre of Handel's *Messiah* (Zelenka's treatment of 'by his stripes we are healed' does not suffer from the comparison). Luks chooses the plangent quality of a vocal octet (about half the overall choir) for some descriptive madrigalian pieces – such as the eloquent music quoting Christ's prophecy that one of his disciples would betray him (highly appropriate for Maundy Thursday, of course). The Good Friday Responses present moments of powerful tension, such as the choral description of earthquakes and opening graves in the aftermath of the Crucifixion (Response II, 'Velum templi scissum est'). The Responses for Holy Saturday evoke contemplation, such as the solemnly beautiful final Response ('Sepulto Domino'), which is sung breathtakingly by Collegium Vocale 1704. This compassionately stylish recording confirms Zelenka's *Responsoria pro Hebdomada Sancta* as a devout masterpiece. **David Vickers**

Miah Persson

Grieg Six Songs, Op 48. Jeg elsker dig (I love but thee), Op 5 No 3 Schubert Suleika I, D720.

Ganymed, D544. Rastlose Liebe, D138. Auf dem Wasser zu singen, D774. Du bist die Ruh, D776.

Gretchen am Spinnrade, D118. Der Hirt auf dem Felsen, D965 Sibelius Våren flyktar hastigt (Spring is flying), Op 13 No 4. Säf, säf, susa (Sigh, sedges, sigh), Op 36 No 4. Five Songs, Op 37 – No 1, Den första kyssen (The first kiss); No 4, Var det en dröm? (Was it a dream?); No 5, Fllickan kom från sin älsklings möte (The Maiden)

Miah Persson *sop* Roger Vignoles *pf* with

Richard Hosford *cl*

Wigmore Hall Live Ⓢ WHLIVE0052 (68' • DDD)

Recorded live, February 2011



Audio fruits of Persson's early 2011 Wigmore recital

A "hotbed of intellectual and aesthetic adventure." — *New York Times*

JULY 6 – AUGUST 19, 2012

BARD SUMMERSCAPE

Bard SummerScape 2012 presents seven weeks of opera, music, theater, dance, films, and cabaret. The season's focal point is the 23rd annual Bard Music Festival, which this year celebrates the French composer Camille Saint-Saëns, whose remarkable career shaped not only the history of music, but also the ways in which that history was transmitted and communicated to the public. SummerScape takes place in the extraordinary Richard B. Fisher Center for the Performing Arts and other venues on Bard College's stunning Mid-Hudson Valley campus.

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PERFORMING ARTS
AT BARD COLLEGE

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

Opera

THE KING IN SPITE OF HIMSELF *(Le roi malgré lui)*

Music by Emmanuel Chabrier
Libretto by Emile de Najac and Paul Burani
American Symphony Orchestra
Conducted by Leon Botstein
Directed by Thaddeus Strassberger
Set design by Kevin Knight

This tale of Henri de Valois, a 16th-century French noble elected by the people of Poland to be their king, despite his great reluctance to be away from France, has been much praised for the quality of its music—indeed, no less a master than Maurice Ravel claimed that Chabrier's score changed the course of French harmony.

ROSNOFF THEATER July 27 – August 5

Dance

COMPAGNIE FÊTES GALANTES

Choreography by Béatrice Massin

Founded in 1993 by Béatrice Massin, Compagnie fêtes galantes brings together baroque style and contemporary choreography, creating a unique kind of baroque dancing that engages and appeals to a modern sensibility.

ROSNOFF THEATER July 6 – 8

Theater

THE IMAGINARY INVALID *(Le malade imaginaire)*

By Molière

Directed by Erica Schmidt

The final play by a master of comedy, *The Imaginary Invalid* is among Molière's greatest works. The illusory agonies of the wealthy Argan, a housebound hypochondriac who sorely desires to marry his daughter to a doctor, have proved tonic to audiences ever since the play premiered in 1673.

THEATER TWO July 13 – 21

Bard Music Festival

Twenty-third Season

SAINT-SAËNS AND HIS WORLD

Two weekends of concerts, panels, and other events bring the musical world of French composer Camille Saint-Saëns vividly to life.

Weekend One: Paris and the Culture of Cosmopolitanism includes a radical reconsideration of Saint-Saëns's most famous piece, *The Carnival of Animals*, and examines the composer's debt to many of his contemporaries and predecessors.

Weekend Two: Confronting Modernism explores music by many of Saint-Saëns's contemporaries—including Franck, Chabrier, and Fauré—and exoticism in music and the influence of Wagner.

August 10–12 and 17–19

Film Festival

FRANCE AND THE COLONIAL IMAGINATION

The SummerScape 2012 film festival explores the legacy of French colonialism in Africa and Southeast Asia.

Thursdays and Sundays, July 12 – August 12

Spiegel Tent

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The mirrored summer pavilion is the stage for a rich array of performers, from dauntless acrobats to bawdy cabaret acts. Enjoy light fare, meals, and drinks selected from Hudson Valley farms, wineries, and breweries.

July 6 – August 19



Photo: ©Scott Barrow

For all of her vocal cultivation, personal magnetism and musical intelligence, Miah Persson seems not to be a born recitalist: her bright, lyric soprano voice hasn't the sort of colouristic range that accommodates levels of gravitas needed in a medium where the voice is so laid bare as an expressive entity. That doesn't mean – on the evidence presented on this disc and her previous all-Schumann recital (BIS, 11/11) – that she can't create some compelling performances on her own terms (especially with such a sympathetic collaboration with pianist Roger Vignoles), even if the more intense moments in her chosen repertoire make her force her voice well beyond its comfort zone.

Her calling card is the opening Schubert song, 'Suleika I'. Vignoles's opening flourish beautifully embodies the 'east wind' in the verse's opening stanza while Persson creates an ever-evolving journey of emotional states described through descriptions of fields, vines, walls and the sun. Even in often-recorded items such as 'Du bist die Ruh', Persson's beautifully sustained line and unindulgent tempo (her version is a full minute shorter than Renée Fleming's on Decca) are a thoroughly satisfying package. 'Gretchen am Spinnrade' is a model of how a mid-weight voice can scale the song's peaks thanks to an inner conviction and trusting how the notes and words can shoulder the dramatic weight. Her voice is nearly ideal for 'The Shepherd on the Rock', her reading being most distinguished in the middle section that convey's the depths of the protagonist's longing. But her 'Rastlose Liebe' is best heard without fresh memories of the profound sorrow conveyed by Dame Janet Baker (EMI).

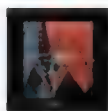
The Grieg and Sibelius groups are full of mixed blessings. So beautiful is her enunciation in the Swedish-language Sibelius songs that you could take phonetic dictation from her performances. The songs themselves go to brutal depths – 'Säf, säf, susa' concerns the wilful destruction of beauty and 'Flickan kom' ends with a woman asking to be buried alive – so her moments of less-than-gracious vocalism are more at home here. The Grieg songs show signs of vocal tiring: Persson sometimes navigates upward vocal leaps by pushing the volume in what sounds more like a vocal necessity than an interpretative choice. In 'Die verschwiegene Nachtigall', though, one can hardly imagine a more alluring nightingale song.

David Patrick Stearns

'Arias for Guadagni'

Arne Alfred – Vengeance, O come inspire me!
CPE Bach Sinfonia, H663 **Gluck** Orfeo ed Euridice – Che puro ciel!; Dance of the Blessed Spirits; Ahimè!
 Dove trascorsi?...Che farò senza Euridice?
 Telemaco – Ah! non turbi il mio riposo **Guadagni**
 Pensa a serbarmi, o cara **Handel** Belshazzar – Destructive war. The Choice of Hercules – Yet, can

I hear that dulcet lay. Saul – O Lord, whose mercies numberless. **Theodora** – The raptur'd soul **Hasse**
 Didone abbandonata – Ah che disse!...Se resto sul lido; Odi colà la frigida tromba?...A trionfar mi chiama **JC Smith** The Fairies – Say, lovely Dream!
Iestyn Davies countertenor **Arcangelo** / **Jonathan Cohen**
 Hyperion © CDA67924 (78' • DDD • T/D)



Davies adopts the persona of a Handel-tamed castrato

The stereotype of the 18th-century castrato is a preening peacock enamoured of his own virtuosity and likely to throw a wobbly at the slightest opportunity. While hardly a shrinking violet, Gaetano Guadagni (1728-92) was revered as a generous colleague and an artist of uncommon refinement and sensibility. He arrived in London, aged just 20, a 'wild and careless singer' (Charles Burney's words) and an actor with 'two left feet'. That all changed under the joint tutelage of Handel and David Garrick. Within a few years Guadagni was feted throughout Europe for his expressive, naturalistic acting and a style of singing that put delicacy of nuance and subtlety of declamation above bravura histrionics.

Guadagni's calling card in later life was Orfeo, a role Gluck and his librettist Calzabigi carefully tailored to his unique gifts. As Burney noted, he invariably drew applause for his 'impassioned and exquisite manner of singing the simple and ballad-like air "Che farò"'. The same epithets could apply to Iestyn Davies's singing. His strong yet pure countertenor has no hint of the hootiness or epicene prissiness that often affect his breed. He phrases with natural eloquence, unexaggeratedly alive to the meaning and colour of words. Crucially, too, he never forces his high notes. The climax of 'Che farò' is all the more touching for its restraint.

While his watchwords were dramatic intensity and emotional truth, Guadagni could match all comers for agility. Davies is no slouch either. Spurred by Arcangelo's fiery orchestral introduction, he balances elegance and vehemence in the coloratura flourishes of Cyrus's 'Destructive war' (*Belshazzar*). A bellicose 'vengeance' aria from Arne's *Alfred* goes with a comparable swing. And it's hardly Davies's fault that a tripping number for the distraught, vacillating Aeneas from Hasse's *Didone abbandonata* sounds too cheerful for the situation – though you won't discover the dramatic context, here and elsewhere, from Patricia Howard's otherwise informative note.

In carping mode you might point to some slightly flustered triplets in Didymus's 'The raptur'd soul' from *Theodora* – the one role Handel wrote specifically for Guadagni. But Davies silences criticism in 'O Lord, whose mercies' (*Saul*) – the very voice of balm, cushioned by ravishing soft strings – and in a plangent aria from Gluck's *Telemaco*, suggesting

agitation just below the surface calm. Jonathan Cohen and his crack period band (the continuo inventively varied) are ever-sensitive and, where apt, virtuoso collaborators, and on their own find an ideal disciplined madness in one of CPE Bach's ever-astonishing 'Hamburg' symphonies. If Davies is more closely miked than I prefer, it hardly hinders enjoyment of an imaginative, consummately sung programme from the brightest star among young British countertenors. **Richard Wigmore**

'EndBeginning'

Anonymous Libera me, Domine (plainchant). In Paradisum (plainchant) **Brumel** Missa pro defunctis
Clemens non Papa Tristitia obsedit me – Infelix ego
Crecquillon Lamentationes Jeremiae **J Hill** Ma fin est mon commencement **Josquin** Absalon fili mi
New York Polyphony

BIS © BIS-SACD1949 (68' • DDD/DSD)



Renaissance laments from New York vocal quartet

Having been more than usually critical of this all-male vocal quartet's previous offering (*Avie*, 8/10), it's good to report positively on this one, of which the centrepiece is an involving reading of Brumel's Requiem. On The Clerks' recording of 2005, where it was paired with La Rue's setting, the work seemed to me the less distinctive of the two. But if the new recording hasn't quite changed my mind, it's convinced me that my previous judgment of it was unduly harsh. The only possible miscalculations in an otherwise assured performance are the overly jaunty delivery of the verse in the Introit and the parallel organum used in sections of the concluding plainsong *Libera me*: I think it unlikely, even in a Requiem service, that late-15th-century 'singing on the book' (as improvising on plainsong was called) would have been quite so...plain.

Much of the remaining music (*Lamentations* by Crecquillon and an impressive motet on the same theme by Clemens non Papa) was new to me. Though the approach is hardly revolutionary (whether knowingly or otherwise, their reading of the famous *Absalon fili mi* is nearly identical to the Hilliard Ensemble's nearly 30 years ago), New York Polyphony have well-matched voices, unanimity of purpose and a far surer touch artistically than before. The contemporary piece that concludes the recital left me unmoved, however, its treatment of Machaut's most famous ballade overly reverential in several senses. An uncertain end, perhaps, to a new beginning?

Fabrice Fitch

Brumel – selected comparison:

Clerks Group, Wickham (2/06) (ASV) CDGAU352

Josquin – selected comparison:

Hilliard Ens (3/84) (VIRG) 561302-2*

Opera



Richard Lawrence reviews *Die Frau ohne Schatten* from Salzburg:

'The Vienna Philharmonic play like angels: Thielemann is alive to every detail of Strauss's kaleidoscopic orchestration' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 84**



David Patrick Stearns reviews arias from Klaus Florian Vogt:

'Wagner seems to come as naturally to him as a folksong, but isn't effort part of the music's drama?' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 87**

Cavalli

DVD

Il Giasone

Christophe Dumaux *countertenor* **Giasone**
Katarina Bradić *mez* **Medea**
Robin Johannsen *sop* **Isifile**
Andrew Ashwin *bass-bar* **Ercolo/Oreste**
Filippo Adami *ten* **Demo**
Josef Wagner *bass-bar* **Glove/Besso**
Angélique Noldus *mez* **Amore/Alinda**
Yaniv d'Or *countertenor* **Delfa/Eolo**
Emilio Pons *ten* **Egeo/Sole**

Symphony Orchestra of Flemish Opera /

Federico Maria Sardelli

Stage director **Mariame Clément**

Video director **Matteo Ricchetti**

Dynamic (P) (C) CDS663 (3h 11' • DDD • S); (F) (P) DVD 33663

(3h 18' • NTSC • 16:9 • DD 5.0 & PCM stereo • 0 • S/s)

Recorded live, May 2010



A century's favourite opera on CD and DVD

Seventeenth-century purists abhorred *Giasone* for playing fast and loose with the myth of the Golden Fleece, and for juxtaposing high and low, comic and serious characters. For the high-minded, Cavalli's opera, premiered in Venice in 1649, became a symbol of La Serenissima's moral and aesthetic decadence. All of which helped make *Giasone* the most-performed opera in the whole of the 17th century. Its amoral mingling of bawdy farce and near-tragedy recalls *L'incoronazione di Poppea* (in which Cavalli may have had a hand), though without the brutality. In librettist Giacinto Andrea Cicognini's retelling of the story of Jason and the Argonauts, no one gets maimed or killed, despite several attempts. Assorted comic servants and confidants come and go. Jason – the only classical hero to have fathered twins by two different women – has abandoned his betrothed, Hypsipyle, Queen of Lemnos, to capture the Golden Fleece. En route he has been ensnared by the enchantress Medea, bored with her mooning lover King Aegeus. After failed murderous plots, all ends happily, with Medea and Aegeus reconciled after he rescues her from drowning, and Jason softened by Hypsipyle's impassioned lament.

Cavalli manages the libretto's almost Shakespearean shifts of tone with theatrical

flair, bringing the diverse characters to life in a musical texture that alternates expressive recitative with short, dance-like arias, often in sarabande rhythm. Recitative and arioso commingle in the opera's two most inspired scenes, Medea's baleful invocation to the spirits of the underworld at the end of Act 1, and Hypsipyle's final lament, with its piercing dissonant clashes.

In a brief interview on the 'bonus' track, producer Mariame Clément points to the plot's zany illogicality and the necessity of emphasising the element of fantasy. The upshot is a surreal mix of ancient and modern, with a set that vaguely suggests a shanty town amid an urban wasteland. Medea is chic-glamorous, Hypsipyle, constantly breast-feeding her twins, a bedraggled gypsy. Hercules is got up as an over-muscled American footballer with Mr Spock ears, while the comic nurse Delfa – an amusingly over-the-top performance by baritone countertenor Yaniv d'Or – looks like a cleaning lady sporting a 14th-century headdress. You get the picture. At the end Cupid cheerfully shunts all the characters into what appears to be an industrial container.

If Clément's shabbily minimalist production eschews the breathtaking transformations envisaged by Cavalli and Cicognini, it certainly provides fair entertainment, not least in the scenes involving Demo, the crippled (when it suits him), stuttering servant-cum-jester. Using the text with the savour of a native Italian, Filippo Adami manages to remain funny on each of his successive appearances. While none of the singers have 'early music' voices, they all characterise with gusto. Clément's production emphasises the over-sexed Jason's unheroic aspect, epitomised by his camp sailor's outfit in Act 2. With his mellifluous, rather feminine-sounding countertenor and expressive declamation, Christophe Dumaux convinces both in amorous mode and in his scene of drowsy remorse in the final act. Two sonorous bass-baritones, Josef Wagner and Andrew Ashwin, make their mark in their twin roles, while Emilio Pons, with an Italianate ring to his tone, is moving in Aegeus's plea to Medea in Act 1. Both heroines are vocally strong, too, if occasionally a bit squally under pressure. Katarina Bradić's visually alluring Medea, by

turn sex-kitten and formidable dominatrix, has the necessary mezzo depth for the role, while American soprano Robin Johannsen as Hypsipyle – the one character wholly free from ridicule – makes her lament a moment of profound emotional truth.

Although the strings can sound a bit scrawny, the Orchestra of Flemish Opera play with plenty of rhythmic zest. Federico Maria Sardelli paces the opera well (the colourfully varied continuo is animated, without fussiness) and provides the instrumental ritornellos missing in the sources, enlivened with recorders and/or tambourine. These presumably use music from other Cavalli operas, though the booklet gives nothing away here. Sardelli has also composed, plausibly, a scene in Act 2 for Aeolus, Cupid, Jove and chorus, for which no original music survives.

I would emphatically recommend this lively and musically convincing DVD of Cavalli's operatic masterpiece over the CDs, where the ear inevitably focuses more on moments of vocal and instrumental roughness. Most crucial, though, is the criminal lack of libretto and translation in the CD booklet. All we get is a poorly translated synopsis. Even for Italian speakers, the comic scenes are virtually meaningless, while the sighs, swells and swoops in Medea's opening scene, irritating as pure sound, at least make sense when we can see the sorceress's orgasmic writhings.

Richard Wigmore

Janáček

DVD

The Makropulos Case

Angela Denoke *sop* **Emilia Marty**
Raymond Very *ten* **Albert Gregor**
Peter Hoare *ten* **Vítek**
Jurgita Adamonytė *mez* **Krista**
Johan Reuter *bar* **Jaroslav Prus**
Aleš Brisceln *ten* **Janek**
Jochen Schmeckenbecher *bar* **Kolenatý**
Peter Lobert *bass* **Stage Technician**
Linda Ormiston *mez* **Cleaning Woman**
Ryland Davies *ten* **Hauk-Šendorf**

Vienna State Opera Chorus; Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra / Esa-Pekka Salonen

Stage director **Christoph Marthaler**

Video director **Hannes Rossacher**

© Major Entertainment (P) DVD 709508;



Courtroom drama: Angela Denoke as Emilia Marty in Salzburg

Ⓜ 709604 (118' + 17' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i •
DTS-HD MA 5.1, DTS 5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)
Recorded live at the Salzburg Festival 2011



Marthaler-Salonen Makropulos from the 2011 Salzburg Festival

A perplexing issue. The performance has class. The Vienna Philharmonic now play this score with greater naturalness and virtuosity than when they recorded it for Mackerras in 1978. It's always a pleasure that Salonen – after his *Tristan* with Peter Sellars – has been asked for more opera. Here this questing composer/conductor has discovered a hard, cold, motoric Janáček, the contemporary of earlier Prokofiev and Shostakovich, even of Gershwin. It is a sound wholly aligned to the stage production.

The singing is mostly terrific. Many noted Emilia Martys have been tested by the exposed, barely accompanied high-lying phrases with which Janáček filled the part in the final scene of Act 3, the nearest he came to writing a kind of Wagnerian Liebestod for the soprano voice. Denoke has these notes and the technique and breathing to deliver them. Her men are strong (Schmeckenbecher's Kolenatý and Davies's Hauk-Šendorf both free of caricatured barking and over-acting) and as for the Krista, Lithuanian Jurgita Adamonytė, it will probably

not be just in this opera that she'll have a distinctive future.

The Swiss theatre director and (let us not forget) composer Christoph Marthaler and his regular German design partner Anna Viebrock gave Bayreuth a sensational *Tristan und Isolde* in 2005 (Opus Arte, 5/10). Their methodology was one of achieving a huge amount of emotion from normalisation of events and atmosphere with occasional expressionist touches. They follow a similar path here, but less surely. To the standard Viebrock vulgar-taste living-room set (here a courtroom) are added two glass-box wings, one a smoking room for institutional nurses, the other a greenhouse. This supporting image of human beings in a laboratory is emphasised by three soundless dumbshow scenes which preface each act, the first a joke about human beings who live extra-long. The relevance to the opera is obvious but, as seen in Hannes Rossacher's random (and often frustratingly distant) filming of the show, the scenes have little impact apart from the odd touch of comedy.

The greatest invention of the production is the physical stylisation of Marty's uncomfortable ageing during the action. Presumably the increasingly dysfunctional movements of Kolenatý, Vitek and Prus are related to this. The booklet-note might have

given a hint here – also as to why Janáček's Act 2 Stage Technician has become 'a conscientious objector' (yet acts mostly as a hospital orderly) and Cleaning Woman 'a Scottish maid' (just because she's Linda Ormiston?). Much of the result though will please, rather bizarrely, those who like 'straight', non-interventionist stagings.

Mike Ashman

Monteverdi

Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria

Anicio Zorzi Giustiniani	ten	Ulisse
Josè Maria Lo Monaco	mez	Penelope
Makoto Sakurada	ten	Telemaco/Eurimaco
Vincenzo Di Donato	ten	Giove
Marco Bussì	bar	Antinoo/Third Sutor
Alessio Tosi	ten	Pisandro/Second Sutor
Roberto Balconi	counterten	Anfinomo/First Sutor
Roberta Mameli	sop	Minerva
Paolo Antognetti	ten	Eumete
Salvo Vitale	bass	Nettuno/Time
Claudio Cavina	counterten	Human Frailty
Giorgia Milanese	sop	Glunone/Fortune
Francesca Cassinari	sop	Cupid
Marta Fumagalli	mez	Erclea
Francesca Lombardi	sop	Melanto
Luca Dordolo	ten	Iro

La Venexiana / Claudio Cavina

Glossa Ⓜ ③ GCD920920 (172' • DDD)



Cavina completes his Monteverdi opera project

No doubt it is a commonplace to point out that *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria* is the least popular of Monteverdi's three surviving full-length operas, but the lack of recordings compared to those of the much earlier *Orfeo* and slightly later *L'incoronazione di Poppea* really is quite marked; the last major CD recording to be reviewed in these pages was René Jacobs's of 1992. Its lack of popularity probably owes much to its perceived plainness, or at least its lack of overt colour next to *Orfeo*'s richly varied textures or *Poppea*'s striking set-piece numbers. The original (or rather, earliest surviving) score is very spare, showing mostly continuo accompaniment and occasional sinfonias and ritornellos for a group of unspecified instruments, and Jacobs (and Harnoncourt before him) took this as an opportunity to vary the scoring, introducing recorders, cornetts and trombones where they saw fit. Claudio Cavina is perfectly happy to stick to single strings, though he does continue the practice of adding extra ensemble passages here and there, as well as the odd telling *accompagnato*. His continuo section of harpsichord, theorbos, harp, gamba and lirone, furthermore, while abstaining from the crazy fantasies often encountered today, offers a constantly shifting underscoring of the action, whether in the halting lute phrases that intensify Penelope's isolation or the clomping bass-notes that illustrate Pisandro's clumsy wooing in Act 2.

But then this is a real ensemble performance in the best sense. Cavina and the mainly Italian singers and players of La Venexiana have already produced excellent recordings of *Orfeo* and *Poppea*, as well as all of Monteverdi's madrigals, and are thoroughly at home in the composer's style and mode of expression. They may not be able to boast the starry names of Christoph Prégardien, Bernarda Fink and Lorraine Hunt Lieberson, as Jacobs can off the back of his self-consciously theatrical Montpellier Opera production, but there is a unity to their performances that brings a naturalness and intimacy perfect for home listening. Not that Cavina's singers lack anything in skill or character: Josè Maria Lo Monaco is deep, womanly and tragic as the stoic Penelope, Anicio Zorzi Giustiniani is warm and soft-toned as Ulisse, and Makoto Sakurada brings a younger-sounding, clearer-focused contrast as Telemaco (though a touch more tenderness could have made his awed description of Helen properly memorable). Roberta Mameli offers bracing and crystalline tone as Minerva (but proves at least partly mortal in some slidy *passaggi*), and Francesca Lombardi is hard-edged, earthy, sometimes even slightly folksy as Melanto. Luca Dordolo

kindly refrains from overdoing it as the stuttery Iro, as do the three risible Suitors.

In fact no one here overdoes anything, and that is the recording's strength. Monteverdi's incredibly skilful and subtle opera, presented with honesty and stylistic and dramatic understanding by performers with nothing to prove about how well they know their business, brought together in a superbly made studio recording – this is state-of-the-art stuff, from which no one could judge the opera as plain or lacking in depth. Apparently Cavina has his sights set on Cavalli – in which case, expect an upturn in his popularity! **Lindsay Kemp**

Selected comparison:

Jacobs (3/93*) (HARM) HML590 1427/9

Mozart

Le nozze di Figaro

José van Dam *bass-bar* **Figaro**
 Ileana Cotrubas *sop* **Susanna**
 Tom Krause *bar* **Count Almaviva**
 Anna Tomowa-Sintow *sop* **Countess Almaviva**
 Frederica von Stade *mez* **Cherubino**
 Jane Berblé *mez* **Marcellina**
 Jules Bastin *bass* **Bartolo**
 Heinz Zednik *ten* **Don Basilio**
 Kurt Equiluz *ten* **Don Curzio**
 Zoltán Kelemen *bar* **Antonio**
 Janet Perry *sop* **Barbarina**

Chorus and Orchestra of the Vienna State Opera /

Herbert von Karajan

Orfeo (M) (3) C856 123D (172' • ADD)

Recorded live, May 1977



Vienna's 1977 Figaro and the return of Karajan

The first time I saw *Figaro* was in Vienna on September 1, 1964, the first night of the new season. As Josef Krips made his way to the rostrum, there was – according to a friend sitting nearby – a shout from the auditorium of 'Hoch Karajan!' Herbert von Karajan had resigned in May as artistic director of the State Opera after a spectacular falling-out with Egon Hilbert, his administrative co-director. It was a typically Viennese scandal. Karajan vowed never to return. But return he did in May 1977, with three operas including this five-year-old production by Jean-Pierre Ponnelle from the Salzburg Festival.

The expectations and the tension must have been high but, apart from an early entry from Jules Bastin in 'La vendetta', there's no sign of nerves. Karajan inclines to fast tempi but he never drives too hard and he will surprise you now and then by taking a more measured approach, as in Cherubino's 'Non so più' and the Count's 'Vedrò, mentr'io sospiro'. He underplays the moment when Figaro outfaces his master in the Act 2 Finale but the *mezza voce* that follows is spot-on; there's a similar surefootedness after Figaro has been slapped by

Susanna in the sextet. In 'Aprite, presto aprite' Karajan gets the merest whisper from the strings while Susanna and Cherubino are paralysed, incapable of action till the final *crescendo* – brilliant.

José van Dam comes across as a serious Figaro: quick-witted in the early part of the opera but showing real anger as early as 'Se a casa madama' and real heartbreak when he thinks that Susanna is deceiving him. Susanna herself, even more resourceful than her husband-to-be, is enchantingly played by Ileana Cotrubas: the smile in her voice as she dresses Cherubino in women's clothes is irresistible. Frederica von Stade is perfect as the page: a ravishing *diminuendo* on the held note in 'Non so più' and a forthright, confident 'Voi che sapete'.

Things are not quite as impressive above stairs. Anna Tomowa-Sintow starts 'Porgi amor' a little shakily but soon rallies. The reprise of 'Dove sono' is delicate but not heart-stopping. Tom Krause, like van Dam a veteran of this production, is formidable in his accompanied recitative and aria but fudges the triplets and the trills. Don Curzio doesn't stammer; the Raeburn/Moberly reordering of Act 3 is adopted; the arias for Marcellina and Don Basilio are omitted; applause is included. Karajan in the spring, and Karl Böhm returning with *Die Frau ohne Schatten* in the autumn: Vienna was the place to be that year.

Richard Lawrence

R Strauss



Die Frau ohne Schatten

Stephen Gould *ten* **Emperor**
 Anne Schwanewilms *sop* **Empress**
 Evelyn Herlitzius *sop* **Barak's Wife**
 Wolfgang Koch *bar* **Barak**
 Michaela Schuster *mez* **Nurse**
 Thomas Johannes Mayer *bar* **Spirit Messenger**
 Markus Brück *bar* **One-eyed Brother**
 Steven Humes *bass* **One-armed Brother**
 Andreas Conrad *ten* **Hunchback Brother**
Concert Association of the Vienna State Opera
Chorus; Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra /
Christian Thielemann

Stage director **Christof Loy**

Video director **Karina Flibich**

Opus Arte (F) (2) DVD OA1072D; (E) OABD7104D
 (3h 40' + 26' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA, DTS5.1
 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live at the Salzburg Festival, July 2011

Extra features include rehearsal sequences and cast gallery



Loy's concept *Die Frau on* DVD from the Sofiensaal

The Woman without a Shadow, completed during the First World War but not staged till 1919, was Hugo von Hofmannsthal's third operatic collaboration with Strauss, after *Der*

Rosenkavalier and *Ariadne auf Naxos*. Conceived as an analogue to *The Magic Flute*, it follows the progress of two contrasted couples: not towards enlightenment but towards starting a family. The libretto is dense, not to say foggy. Does the shadow denote pregnancy or simply the ability to bear children? What lies behind the ambivalent role of the Nurse? The audience needs all the help it can get. It doesn't get it in Robert Carsen's current production at the Vienna State Opera, where the Empress spends much of her time in bed; and it certainly doesn't get it here.

For this is no staging but a concert performance with a difference. Christof Loy has set the opera in the Sofiensaal in Vienna and the 'action' is the recording made by Decca in 1955. So for much of the time the characters clutch vocal scores and sing from music stands. The Nurse wears hat, coat and gloves, the Spirit Messenger a coat and scarf (the hall was unheated, according to Loy). Assistant producers move stands and singers around. During an orchestral interlude, Barak leaves the stage for a drink and a smoke. Moreover – though you wouldn't know without reading Mike Ashman's booklet-note – Loy sees the Empress as a young singer learning from her more experienced colleagues.

It's all a long way from the original but if you can accept Loy's reinvention there's much to admire. One or two imprecise entries aside, the Vienna Philharmonic play like angels: Christian Thielemann is alive to every detail of Strauss's kaleidoscopic orchestration. As the Empress, Anne Schwanewilms is outstanding, her gleaming soprano scoring bullseye after bullseye. Michaela Schuster's subtle facial expressions are well caught by the camera but the close-ups of Evelyn Herlitzius are less than flattering. Wolfgang Koch is a sterling Barak; Stephen Gould has the top notes but it's hard to be moved by the Emperor's Act 2 solo when you have just seen him take a sip of water.

Götz Friedrich's production for Solti (Decca) is reassuringly traditional; Ennosuke Ichikawa's for Sawallisch (ArtHaus Musik), better sung, makes a number of cuts. Thielemann/Loy is absolutely complete, including all the Empress's spoken words in Act 3.

Richard Lawrence

Selected comparisons:

Solti (12/02) (DECC) 071 425-9DHD

Sawallisch (ARTH) 107 245

Verdi

La traviata

Joan Sutherland *sop* Violetta
 Carlo Bergonzi *ten* Alfredo
 Robert Merrill *bar* Germont
 Miti Truccato Pace *contr* Flora
 Dora Carral *sop* Annina
 Piero de Palma *ten* Gastone
 Paolo Pedani *bass* Baron

Silvio Malonica *bass* Marquis
 Giovanni Folani *bass* Doctor
 Angelo Mercuriali *ten* Giuseppe
 Mario Frosini *bar* Messenger
 Chorus and Orchestra of the Maggio Musicale,
 Florence / Sir John Pritchard
 Eloquence (B) 2 480 6039 (132' • ADD)
 Recorded 1962. From Decca SET249/51 (8/63⁸, 4/99⁸)

Verdi

La traviata

Natalie Dessay *sop* Violetta
 Charles Castronovo *ten* Alfredo
 Ludovic Tézier *bar* Germont
 Silvia de La Muela *mez* Flora
 Adelina Scarabelli *sop* Annina
 Manuel Nuñez Camelino *ten* Gastone
 Kostas Smoriginas *bar* Baron
 Andrea Mastroni *bass* Marquis
 Maurizio Lo Piccolo *bass* Doctor
 Mati Turi *ten* Giuseppe
 Uku Joller *bass-bar* Messenger

Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir; London

Symphony Orchestra / Louis Langrée

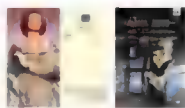
Stage director Jean-François Sivadier

Video director Don Kent

Virgin Classics (D) DVD 730798-9

(139' • NTSC • 16:9 • DTS 5.1 & LPCM stereo • O • s)

Recorded live at the Aix-en-Provence Festival 2011



Sutherland's 1962 Traviata on disc and Sivadier's Aix production on screen

What binds these *Traviatas*, made almost 50 years apart, is how neatly one is what the other is not. Natalie Dessay, star of the 2011 DVD from Aix-en-Provence, has extolled the virtues of Joan Sutherland's power and agility that could well serve as a capsule review of this reissued 1962 Sutherland recording. And though Dessay wasn't built to have Sutherland's amplitude, the theatrical realism she brings to the role of Violetta was quite beyond Sutherland. Both are satisfying renderings of the opera but fall short of encompassing its totality. But *La traviata* accommodates many different routes into the heartbreaking world of the dying courtesan Violetta that don't leave you missing any of the others.

For opera-goers of a certain age, Sutherland's first recording was a starter *Traviata*. The Sutherland name-brand landed the original LPs in public libraries, where I, for one, discovered much of the opera repertoire. And though I somehow knew this wasn't going to be a *Traviata* I wanted to live with, the recording has an Urtext quality that shows you exactly what Verdi wrote. Well, almost exactly. The singers take optional high notes; it's Italian opera after all. But in all other respects, Sutherland's Violetta is certainly among the most musically accurate on disc. One doesn't

realise how wayward the pitch can be in some of the wider vocal leaps in her Act 1 soliloquy until you hear them sung spot-on. Or close to it. Sutherland isn't flawless (I've heard an even more accurate live performance from Eva Mei). But the beauty of this recording is that its Urtext attitude doesn't translate into sterility.

By modern theatrical standards, Sutherland seems to outsource the emotional expression of her role to *bel canto* singing style. Simply follow the tradition and pathos takes care of itself. One hears a handful of phrasing techniques (distinctively rounded phrases or descending *portamentos*) employed to varying degrees to suit the emotional temperature of any given moment, almost like the prescribed physical gestures that were widely used in the 19th century. And these devices do their job without seeming mannered amid the brimming good health and endless colour of the Sutherland voice, then in the early years of a great career.

Ever-tasteful Carlo Bergonzi seems a bit underpowered next to her; Robert Merrill was only starting to acquire the theatrical fluency of his later years. Yet Sir John Pritchard's attentive conducting – he even gives inner soliloquies a distinctive pulse that tells you such thoughts aren't heard out loud – in a recording acoustic with much bloom make this recording preferable to Sutherland's slicker but more vocally laboured 1981 set with Luciano Pavarotti.

Though Dessay's Violetta may prove to be a late-career effort (one not as vocally wayward as some recent efforts), she's more viable than the later Sutherland performance because she uses her vocal resources with such specificity of theatrical purpose. Dessay is in her glory in her Act 2 confrontation with the elder Germont. One phrase after another is crystallised with meaning by her voice and seconded by her inward theatrical fire that tells you she's living the role like nobody since now-retired Teresa Stratas. Elsewhere, she's ceaselessly interesting, from the nasty edge she brings to the character in Act 1 to her final death scene, when she exultantly walks towards her death. Her slight stature is used beautifully to convey the character's end-of-life fragility.

Charles Castronovo is probably the handsomest Alfredo on DVD though his singing, always fine, never reaches the realm of his great predecessors in the role. As Germont, Ludovic Tézier is a curiosity: he sings well and with feeling but is resolutely stony-faced and looks young enough to be Alfredo's brother.

Pardon me for treating the London Symphony Orchestra under Louis Langrée as a bit of an afterthought but that's bound to happen amid the theatrical distraction of Jean-François Sivadier's production. The setting is sort of a backstage netherworld of a theatre or club – Violetta's world was about about superficial self-presentation, to be sure – that

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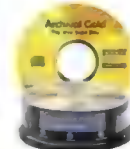


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often includes the clean-up crew working in the background while any number of singers are attempting to command the stage. Dress is dissolute modern with lots of hipster hats. The intentional artificiality extends to the country setting of Act 2, with painted panels of clouds and fields. None of this seriously undercuts the opera. But running the acts together does. This is one opera where what happens between the acts is dramatic as what unfolds onstage – an element that's lost when the opera becomes a continuous whole. Where Sivadier truly serves the opera is in the nuanced character interaction. Time and again, he gets to the heart of a scene, almost despite his own production. **David Patrick Stearns**

Wagner

Die Walküre

Stig Andersen *ten*.....Siegmond
Yvonne Howard *mez*.....Sieglinde
Susan Bullock *sop*.....Brünnhilde
Egils Silins *bass-bar*.....Wotan
Susan Bickley *mez*.....Fricka
Clive Bayley *bass*.....Hunding
Miranda Keys *sop*.....Gerhilde
Katherine Broderick *sop*.....Helmwige
Elaine McKrill *sop*.....Ortlinde
Sarah Castle *mez*.....Waltraute
Leah Marian Jones *mez*.....Rosswelse
Alison Kettlewell *mez*.....Siegrune
Ceri Williams *mez*.....Grimgerde
Linda Finnie *mez*.....Schwertleite

Hallé Orchestra / Sir Mark Elder

Hallé ④ CDHLD7531 (4h 8' • DDD • S)

Recorded live at Bridgewater Hall, Manchester, July 2011

Libretto, translation and pictures of the Manchester International Festival 2011 performance included on a fifth disc



Phase Two of the Hallé's live concert Ring

I suspect that, to an even greater extent than his award-winning *Götterdämmerung* (7/10), the second instalment of Sir Mark Elder's Hallé *Ring* cycle will divide critical opinion. The fruit of the conductor's long experience of Wagner, and with the benefit of orchestral playing strong in discipline and powerful in eloquence, this performance is as coherent and consistent as any of the many other fine recordings currently on offer. Even a listener who finds the main tempo of the final scene too slow, generating more sentimentality than solemnity, is likely to be struck by the unusual restraint of the orchestral playing as Wotan lays Brünnhilde to rest, and by the remarkable range of moods, between gentle quietness and heroic incisiveness, summoned up by the Latvian bass-baritone Egils Silins.

Silins's achievement is the more spectacular since it was apparently thought until shortly

before Act 2 began that indisposition might prevent him from completing the performance. With Yvonne Howard a late substitute for the planned Sieglinde, this was clearly one of those Wagner events in which the resolve of all concerned was tested to the utmost, and the fact that the recording includes takes from rehearsals as well as from the actual performances doubtless reflects this. Like Susan Bullock (Brünnhilde), Howard might have sounded less edgily vibrant in a less closely focused acoustic. Neither singer seems entirely at ease with the German text, yet they are both as dramatically engaged as they would be on stage, and Bullock's final plea to Wotan is as thrilling as with most if not all of her recorded rivals. Susan Bickley also makes as much as possible of Fricka's starchy tirades in Act 2.

Elder's preference for relatively broad tempi is clear from early in Act 1; parts of Siegmund's monologue, as well as 'Winterstürme', could well be judged lethargic, though Stig Andersen is alert and characterful throughout, without excessive emoting, and Clive Bayley is an imposingly black-voiced Hunding. With fewer issues concerning tempo, Act 2 contributes greatly to the accumulating dramatic tension and to confirming the overall conviction of Elder's approach. Perhaps the most important point is that, in a crowded field, Elder has a cast, as well as an interpretative stance, that ensure a distinctive as well as a memorable experience. However well you think you know *Die Walküre*, this recording should leave you in renewed awe at Wagner's genius – not a bad thing as his bicentenary approaches.

Arnold Whittall

'Helden'

Flotow *Martha* – Ach so fromm, ach so traut

Korngold *Die tote Stadt* – Glück, das mir verblieb^a

Lortzing *Zar und Zimmermann* – Lebe wohl, mein

flandrisch Mädchen *Mozart* *Die Zauberflöte* – Dies

Bildnis ist bezaubernd schön *Wagner* *Lohengrin* –

Act 3, Prelude: In fernem Land, unnahbar euren

Schritten. *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* – Act 3,

Prelude: Morgenlich leuchtend im rosigen Schein.

Die Walküre – Winterstürme wichen dem

Wonnemond *Weber* *Der Freischütz* – Durch die

Wälder, durch die Auen. *Oberon* – Overture: Ich

juble in Glück und Hoffnung neu

Klaus Florian Vogt *ten*^a **Manuela Uhl** *sop* **Orchestra of**

Die Deutsche Oper Berlin / Peter Schneider

Sony Classical ④ 88697 98864-2 (60' • DDD • T/D)

^aRecorded live at the Deutsche Oper Berlin, July 2011



Austro-German arias from Sony's Heldentenor Vogt

Initial encounters with Klaus Florian Vogt can be unsettling. The voice is too small, sweet and youthful to be a Heldentenor. And yet it is. Upon first hearing him in his Montreal Symphony Orchestra recording of *Das Lied von*

der Erde (A/09), I thought he was a casting mistake. The poor lad! Here was a voice that seemed suitable for Purcell and was instead singing Mahler's most punishing vocal lines. Vocal sound aside, his singing curiously lacked clear attacks but seemed to alight more casually upon any given phrase. Not until hearing him in the Netherlands Radio Orchestra's concert *Parsifal* (Challenge Classics, 12/11) did I understand that he may well represent a welcome new chapter in Wagnerian singing.

Of course, recordings can be deceptive, but even if that's the case, Siegmund's 'Winterstürme' scene from *Die Walküre* is never heard with such an effortless *legato* or with a timbre that would suggest a young lover seized with the thrill of spring. Rarely have the high notes in the Prize Song from *Die Meistersinger* been achieved with such ease. At times, Wagner seems to come as naturally to him as a folksong, so lacking is there the usual audible effort. Isn't effort part of the music's drama? Even with the greatest of all Heldentenors, the baritone Lauritz Melchior? Not here.

My main points of reference for Vogt are Wolfgang Windgassen in terms of sound (though Vogt is even more tenor-ish) and, going further back, Walter Widdop (whose vocal technique forwent the chest voice that increasingly dominated 20th-century tenorism). In the years since the Mahler recording, Vogt has acquired more heft in the middle of his voice that he uses mainly when climaxing an aria on this disc – and always with great effect. Just when you think you've heard all that he has, there's more. What suggests that he's a genuine Heldentenor is his reading of a non-Helden aria from *The Magic Flute*: the music explores a fuller range of the tenor voice, and one in which Vogt is a tad less comfortable, as suggested not by any particular sense of vocal discomfort but a slightly diminished sense of expressive comprehension in terms of what the high notes mean. He's happier in Wagner, where high notes are an intensification of what is already conveyed in middle register. He's a language-based tenor and seems best with word-oriented Wagner.

Those are the high points of the disc for me; they, alone, are worth its acquisition. There are also beautifully sung but less interesting performances of lighter works, most notably Weber's 'Ich juble in Glück' from *Oberon*, a hybrid piece that isn't often sung sympathetically but is here. Though some of the best tenors can wear out their welcome in an aria anthology, Vogt's performances are parceled between well-played overtures, capably conducted by Peter Schneider. At the end of the disc, Vogt sounds particularly fresh alongside the slightly fatigued Manuela Uhl in a duet from Korngold's *Die tote Stadt* – one portion of this predominantly studio-recorded disc that was captured live. **David Patrick Stearns**

Books



Philip Clark welcomes the first biography of Henry Cowell:

'Cowell did for the tone-cluster and forearm slam what Debussy did for the whole-tone scale'



Jeremy Nicholas reads a study of mild-mannered Charles Munch:

'Those who heard him in concert confirm that it was here and not on record that you heard the echt Munch'

Henry Cowell

A Made Man of Music

By Joel Sachs

Oxford University Press, HB, 624pp, £30

ISBN 978-0-19-510895-8



'Virtually no one called Schoenberg "Arnold"; Joel Sachs notes in his new biography of

Henry Cowell, the California-born mid-century American experimental composer. 'In the US, though, one is immediately on a first name basis with virtually everyone in sight, especially on the West Coast in the arts.'

Which is why Sachs refers to Cowell as 'Henry' throughout his gorgeously written biography, which, at 520 pages of body text, never feels sluggish because Sachs sets a furious narrative tempo from the get-go, each page seemingly revealing a nugget of information that history was hitherto reluctant to divulge. The cosy familiarity of calling Cowell 'Henry' is a paradox, though: unlike Charles, John, Lou or Conlon, few music lovers, even American experimental music geeks, are on intimate terms with Cowell. Despite his associations with Ives, Ruggles and Varèse; that Conlon Nancarrow spent his life doggedly composing studies for player piano after reading a throwaway line about pianolas in Cowell's 1930 book *New Musical Resources*; his status as Cage and Lou Harrison's mentor – Cowell even taught Gershwin for a while – his own music is rarely discussed in equivalent detail, and be honest, when did you last see a work of Cowell's programmed in concert?

As Sachs uncovers, this unfair neglect is due partly to rotten luck, partly to his disorientating stylistic range. The pieces that inspired Cage, Harrison, Ives et al represent Cowell at his most exploratory and liberated. Early-1920s compositions such as *Aeolian Harp* and *The Banshee*, both tailored to the inside of a piano, essentially established the idea that there are rich sonic pickings indeed if you're ready to view the instrument as more than a 'keyboard'.

Bartók was deeply impressed with pieces such as *The Tides of Manaunau* and

Advertisement, which do for the tone-cluster and forearm keyboard slam what Debussy did for the whole-tone scale: ie evolve a fresh perspective on harmony by messing with expectations of tonic and dominant. Cowell's (String) *Quartet Euphometric* and Concerto for Rhythmicon and Orchestra opened up another front: his so-called 'harmony of rhythm' proposed music with a unifying substructure by using the harmonic ratios of individual chords to outline rhythmic integers. But how does that music square with the Cowell of the nicely behaved, eminently hummable *Hymn and Fuguing Tunes*?

He once compared noise to sex – both are 'essential to existence but impolite to mention' – and Cowell's bisexuality plunged him into a life-changing crisis when, in 1936, he was imprisoned on what has usually been quaintly referred to as a 'morals' charge. Sachs's research reveals the brutal injustice he endured. The 'felony' added up to little more than a consensual fumble; Cowell was only released after a testing four years during which he showed great strength of spirit by teaching music to fellow prisoners and continuing to compose.

But the experience broke him and Sachs's narrative turns elegiac as Cowell, now technically a free man, becomes imprisoned by paranoia. He eliminated risk from his life – and that included his music. And yet Cowell remains that vital missing link between Ives and subsequent strains of experimental thinking in American music. This man made of music deserves this first biography and a revival too; let's hope Sachs's book seals the deal. **Philip Clark**

Charles Munch

By D Kern Holoman

Oxford University Press, HB, 352pp, £22.50

ISBN 978-0-19-977270-4



Charles Munch never figures in the lists of the all-time great conductors alongside the likes of Toscanini, Furtwängler and Karajan. Although he was undoubtedly

a very great conductor, Munch seems unfairly destined to second-division status. Everyone seems to have adored him. Was he simply too nice? Norman Lebrecht in *The Maestro Myth* (London: 1991; tellingly subtitled 'Great Conductors in Pursuit of Power') devotes a total of just two sentences to the 'mild-mannered Alsatian' who replaced the 'arrogant and autocratic' Koussevitzky in Boston (1949), where he 'conducted genially for thirteen years', adding that it was Munch who brought the young Seiji Ozawa to Tanglewood and the Koussevitzky Competition which launched his career.

Lebrecht refers to him as 'Münch'. Professor Holomon prefaces his narrative by clearing up once and for all (for this fan, at least) the orthography and pronunciation of his name. Munch was born with an umlaut and kept it well into the post-war period. When he was at the Gewandhaus he was called Carl Münch. The cover of his first American recording billed him as 'Charles Muench'. It was only when he went to Boston that he finally became Munch, pronounced 'with a hint of umlaut so as not to rhyme with "crunch"'. Charles (as in The Prince of Wales) or Charles (as in de Gaulle)? It seems either will do.

He was born into a musical family in 1891 in Strasbourg, then part of Germany. He started out as a violinist but at the outbreak of the First World War was enlisted in the German army. He was gassed at Péronne and wounded at Verdun. During the 1920s he taught violin at Strasbourg and Leipzig conservatories, and played under Furtwängler and Walter in the Gewandhaus Orchestra. Famously – and unlike most important conductors – Munch did not take to the podium until he was 41. A French citizen, he remained in Paris during the war while refusing to collaborate with the Nazis in any way, made his American debut with the Boston Symphony in 1946 and then, after a further US tour with the French Radio Orchestra, was chosen to succeed Koussevitzky as chief conductor of the BSO, at that time, arguably, the greatest



Charles Munch and the Boston Symphony Orchestra with Benny Goodman in Mozart's Clarinet Concerto at Tanglewood, July 6, 1956

orchestra in the world. He retired from the post in 1962 and returned to Europe but it was in America that he died, suffering a heart attack during a 1968 tour with the Orchestre de Paris.

Almost half the book, not surprisingly, is devoted to Munch's American years and Professor Holoman, himself a conductor, has marshalled an impressive array of sources to tell the story (Munch's unpopular successor, Erich Leinsdorf, incidentally, lasted seven years, not five as stated). This he does with a light touch and a tone that is every bit as *aimable* as his subject. Not the least interesting aspects, though, are Holoman's account of Munch's early years where his bicultural identity and the familial presence of Albert Schweitzer were the chief influences on his development.

Of the enigmatic private life of this shy man, Holoman offers hints and

speculation. Munch's late (1933) marriage to the physically handicapped Geneviève ('Vivette') Maury, whose grandfather had headed the consortium that owned Nestlé, allowed him financial independence while establishing himself as a conductor. Holoman thinks that this may have been a *mariage blanc*, and moreover one agreed to in advance. Vivette seems to have tolerated the string of relationships (physical or otherwise) that her husband enjoyed, most notably with the pianist Nicole Henriot Schweitzer (1925-2001).

My one criticism of the book is the lack of a discography, a surprising omission. (For this, the dustcover directs you to oup.com/us/charlesmunch which this reader, however, failed to access.) And the fact that so many of Munch's recordings, especially those of the French repertoire, have stood the test of time and remain, if

not benchmarks, essential listening, surely merited some comment.

That said, those who heard him in concert confirm that it was here and not on record that you heard the *echt* Munch. The series of films recently released for the first time from the Boston Symphony archives would seem to justify that view. The dislike of superfluous rehearsal and the insistence on spontaneity were Munch hallmarks. Holoman quotes to advantage Ralph Gomberg, former principal oboist with the BSO: 'You never knew what was going to happen at a concert...Many times [when] we played the last movement of the *Fantastic Symphony* it was like an avalanche going down a steep mountain... The adrenalin starts going and you do it. We got out of those performances and we were exhilarated, absolutely exhilarated.' Like this book, quite a tribute to a great musician.

Jeremy Nicholas

REPLAY

Rob Cowan's monthly survey of reissues and archive recordings

Gems from the dawn of stereo

Nielsen and Brahms from Barbirolli; a fine conclusion to an Ansermet series; a terrific Toscanini transfer

Listening recently to a couple of brilliant digital recordings of Nielsen's Fourth Symphony had me pondering: what's missing here? Tension, excitement, or a necessary sense of inner struggle? Revisiting **Sir John Barbirolli's** 1959 Hallé recording (now reissued by the Barbirolli Society alongside a glowing Brahms Fourth) provided the answer. In a recent Radio 3 interview Nikolaus Harnoncourt commented that many of the greatest performances teeter on the brink of catastrophe, meaning that everyone is 'nearing the edge' for a common cause – that cause being the music. In a sense, **Lovro von Matačić's** theatrical 1982 live account of Smetana's complete *Má vlast* with the Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra achieves a similar effect, though tempi are often slower than the norm.

A sudden rush of nostalgia transformed my listening into a soundtrack for memory lane when I opened the booklet to a Decca Eloquence reissue of a Tchaikovsky triple-bill, Decca's first-ever official stereo record in fact, where the London Symphony

'Many of the greatest performances teeter on the brink of catastrophe'

Orchestra and the Band of the Grenadier Guards are conducted by **Kenneth Alwyn** for a programme consisting of the *1812 Overture*, *Capriccio italiano* and *Marche slave*. The familiar 'SXL' LP cover took me back to childhood, with vivid recollections of a rather fanatical listening ritual, sitting in precisely the right position between the speakers, bodging a homemade bass-speaker unit, etc – oh, the fun of it! Alwyn's performances still sound fresh-minted (don't forget this is the LSO of those

Antal Dorati/Mercury spectaculars) and the addition of a 20-minute *Swan Lake Suite* with the LPO makes for a warming and musically satisfying listen. Other transfers exist but this, taken from Decca's mastertapes, tops them both and Alwyn's booklet-notes provide an added source of pleasure.

There won't be too many collectors of a certain age who didn't at some time or another own records of performances conducted by **Ernest Ansermet**. Decca Eloquence has now reached the end of its invaluable Ansermet series, the last release being 'Stravinsky-Ansermet: The First Decca Recordings'. Versions of *Petrushka* and the *Firebird Suite* with the LPO and Suisse Romande Orchestra deliver dynamism in the former and textural variety in the latter, and there are subtle differences between Ansermet's two Suisse Romande recordings of the 'Divertimento' from *Le baiser de la fée* (1951, and 1962 in stereo). Early Suisse Romande versions of *The Rite of Spring* and *Circus Polka* are musically revealing but surely the highlights of the set are superb performances of *Renard* (1955, in stereo with a cast that includes Michel Sénéchal, Hugues Cuénod and Heinz Rehfuß) and *Oedipus Rex* (with Cuénod, Ernst Haefliger and Hélène Bouvier).

Ansermet's way with Arthur Honegger's music is both thoughtful and austere. I was very glad to revisit his powerful but never overheated account of the *Symphonie liturgique*, while his readings of the Second and Fourth symphonies are hardly less compelling. *Le Roi David* is a different world entirely, a work full of beauty, 'intended to hold the attention of an unsophisticated audience', to quote the late David Drew, but this will surely do just that. The appealing *Une cantate de Noël* will prove another

worthwhile acquisition, as will Ansermet's famous readings of *Pacific 231* and Frank Martin's *In terra pax*. Featured soloists in this four-disc Honegger/Martin collection include the likes of Suzanne Danco, Marga Höffgen and Ernst Haefliger.

While on the subject of fine singers, a desirable Audite 'first release' features the American baritone **Barry McDaniel**, whose warm-textured singing and persuasive interpretative manner of various art songs are tellingly illustrated in a programme of works by Schubert, Schumann, Wolf, Duparc, Ravel and Debussy. Perspective purchasers need only sample the opening track, Schubert's sizeable Lied 'Der Winterabend', to have their most optimistic suspicions confirmed.

THE RECORDINGS



Nielsen, Brahms Sym No 4
Hallé / Barbirolli
Barbirolli Society (M) SJB1061



Smetana *Má vlast*
ORF RSO / Von Matačić
Orfeo (S) (2) C836 112B



Tchaikovsky 1812 Overture, etc
LSO; LPO / Alwyn
Decca Eloquence (B) 480 5048



'Stravinsky-Ansermet: The First Decca Recordings'
Decca Eloquence (S) (4) 480 3775



Honegger Symphonies, etc
Suisse Romande / Ansermet
Decca Eloquence (S) (3) 480 2316



'Barry McDaniel sings Schubert, Schumann, Wolf and Duparc'
Audite (M) (2) AUDITE23 426

Vintage Backhaus

A high priority among Pristine Audio's many recent worthwhile enterprises is the long-awaited reissue of Wilhelm Backhaus's first (ie early 1950s) Beethoven piano sonata cycle, its sole digitised representative on Decca's own CD label being the *Hammerklavier*, which Backhaus never got round to re-recording when he prepared his second (stereo) cycle and which Decca themselves reissued to 'complete' the later set. Hopping between the old and the new has been fascinating, as much for the surprise elements as for the ever-engaging process of charting Backhaus's journey back to dazzling youthfulness. In the slower music it's a question of marginally more tension on the earlier set, occasionally less splitting of chords, too, though I'm personally not averse to old-fashioned expressive devices, especially as Backhaus never overdoes them. Tempo-wise, there's little to choose between the two sets. Take Op 10 No 3's first movement, just a few seconds' difference (the earlier version being marginally slower) and yet the subtle tonal contrasts, mostly concerning the younger Backhaus's stronger emphases and meatier chords, or his wider dynamic range, is cumulatively telling. The two recordings of the *Pathétique* are again superficially similar and yet an extra element of drama makes the earlier version an enlightening supplement to its more relaxed stereo successor. On the evidence presented so far, if pressured into choosing one set or the other, I'd probably go for the Pristine option, where the dramatic impetus is more marked, although I wouldn't willingly miss out on the wise geniality of Backhaus's later recordings. All the transfers that I've so far heard are excellent.

THE RECORDINGS



**Backhaus Beethoven Edition,
Vol 2: Piano Sonatas Nos 5-9**
Pristine Audio © PAKM052

Brahms and friends

A newly discovered 1936 German radio recording of Brahms's First Piano Concerto by the Thuringian pianist Alfred Hoehn with the Berlin RSO under Max Fiedler is at the opposite end of the interpretative spectrum. Where Backhaus and Sir Adrian Boult (Naxos 8 110699) clock up 19'11" for Brahms's first movement, Hoehn and Fiedler stretch to a fairly broad 23'37". Fiedler, who knew Brahms well, combines lean textures with a broad, emphatic gait, his strings memorably sombre and austere. Hoehn was celebrated for the delicacy and shading of his touch, though some commentators observed that his intellect wasn't quite the equal of his virtuoso facility. The evidence suggests otherwise, offering



Sir John Barbirolli: his recordings of the fourth symphonies of Brahms and Nielsen have been reissued

ample proof that at least on this occasion he and Fiedler had the work's scale and poetic slant under their belts. The slow movement (13'22") is especially beautiful, the delicacy of Hoehn's approach coming well to the fore. As so often with these early broadcasts, one is time and again struck by the degree of freedom that both artists allow themselves, ranging from flexible tempi and breathtakingly soft orchestral *pianissimos* to expressively broken chords from Hoehn. The disc also includes various solo recordings, none of them previously issued, by pianists associated with Brahms – Etelka Freund, Ilona Eibenschütz and, most impressively, Carl Friedberg, who offers a wildly spontaneous 'live' account of the quirky Scherzo, Op 4. The sound isn't exactly state-of-the-art but those interested in Brahms, and Romantic piano-playing in general, will find this generous collection utterly absorbing. There's a bonus, too: a surprisingly good transfer of Joseph Joachim giving an unbuttoned performance Brahms's First *Hungarian Dance* in 1903. Now there's history for you!

THE RECORDINGS



**'Behind the Notes: Brahms
performed by colleagues and
pupils'** Arbiter © ARBITER160

Toscanini revelation

Now that RCA has returned its monumental 'Toscanini Collection' (88697 916312-6) to circulation, the thorny question of whose

transfer is best once again rears its head. For example, there are three commercial recordings of Toscanini conducting Schubert's *Great C major Symphony*, all of them issued by RCA and including a studio version from February 27, 1947. In his book *Arturo Toscanini: The NBC Years* (Amadeus Press: 2003), Mortimer Frank rightly regrets that RCA's CD of this particular performance (RCA GD60291, 11/92) isn't better engineered, and based on the evidence of other RCA collections I'm assuming that the new set includes the same transfer. Happily for us, the Japanese label Opus Kura has come to the rescue with a revised transfer taken from the original Victor 78s that dwarfs RCA's effort. Where the RCA is hollow and harsh, the Opus Kura has warmth and depth. The performance is more finely drawn and lighter on its feet than its RCA rivals (other live performances also exist), though the tension created in the first two movements and the forward momentum of the last two remain riveting. Listening to this new transfer is like hearing the recording for the very first time, a rare privilege for seasoned Toscanini devotees. The coupling dates from the same month, music from Berlioz's *Roméo et Juliette* which, although ideally demanding rather more in the way of orchestral detail, still sounds better than ever. **G**

THE RECORDINGS



Schubert Symphony No 9, etc
NBC SO / Toscanini
Opus Kura © OPK2099

THE SPECIALIST'S GUIDE TO...

Mendelssohn's chamber music

The Octet is Mendelssohn's most famous chamber work, says **Harriet Smith**, but there are several equally extraordinary masterpieces to discover if only you know where to look



Felix Mendelssohn: demonstrating his prodigious musical talent to Goethe (right) in 1821

Pity the poor artist who peaks at 16, the age at which Mendelssohn wrote his Octet. Yet is this truly the peak of his chamber musical achievement? The CD catalogues would certainly seem to support this notion, and the piece remains just as popular in the concert hall. But the Octet is just one manifestation of the composer's many-sided genius. That we've inherited such a skewed view of Mendelssohn is down to the vagaries of history: here's a polymath who was revered in his lifetime, sanctified after his early but oh-so-Romantic death and then inevitably denigrated by later

generations, even if he was still loved by amateurs, be they pianists playing his *Songs Without Words* or choral societies for whom *Elijah* remained a perennial favourite.

Back in March 1927 there was 'A Plea for More Mendelssohn' in the pages of this journal. 'His music is like a well-ordered garden, bright with many-coloured flowers, and laid out in trim beds of orderly design. The sun is nearly always shining, and the rain clouds pass overhead only to vanish again...Also, in the twilight, the fairies are wont at times to frolic at his bidding, which they will do for no other German master. Why quarrel with such

a garden because it is not a wilderness? Anyone, however, who will spend a leisure hour in perusing Mendelssohn's quartets, quintets and octet will assuredly be – as the hairdressing advertisements say – "surprised and delighted"!

It's easy to poke fun at the slightly naive tone of this article, which unwittingly compounds the idea of Mendelssohn as a composer without true depth, but the author's heart was in the right place. And with any luck the following selection will not only surprise and delight but also demonstrate the profundity of Mendelssohn's greatest chamber works. **G**



16 *Sextet for piano and strings, Op 110*

Delos Ⓢ DE3266

The Sextet, scored for violin, two violas, cello, double bass

and piano, predates the Octet by a year and offers a fascinating reflection of where Mendelssohn's preoccupations lay at this time. You can trace his musical roots, be it Weber in the bubblingly extrovert finale, or Hummel, Moscheles and Kalkbrenner in the virtuosity of the piano-writing. The performers here combine considerable dexterity where needed with warmth in the touching *Adagio*.

Lincoln Center Chamber Music Society



9 *Violin Sonata in F (1838)*

Warner Ⓢ 2564 69786-6 (3/08)

We have Yehudi Menuhin to thank for the rediscovery of

this wonderful piece, which Mendelssohn never finished revising for publication, once dismissing it as 'wretched'. That it's anything but wretched is tellingly revealed in a live recording by Makhtin and Berezovsky, who emphasise the Beethovenian vigour of the opening movement and relish – but never overindulge – the sublime *Adagio*; the terrier-ish finale startles with its considerable virtuosity.

Dmitri Makhtin vn Boris Berezovsky pf



4 *Piano Quartet No 3, Op 3*

Virgin Ⓢ VC7 91183-2 (6/91)

If the First and Second Piano Quartets (written when

Mendelssohn was 13 and 14 respectively) are extraordinary, it's the Third (dating from the same year as the Octet) that truly amazes – not simply for the composer's command of structure and the magnificent opening *Allegro molto*, but also for the confidence and virtuosity of the writing for all four instruments. Domus set the standard more than two decades ago, but you may have to hunt to find a copy.

Domus



7 *String Quartets, Op 44*

EMI Ⓢ 500857-2 (8/93)

In between the intensity of the Op 13 (1827) and Op 80 (1847)

quartets comes the pure pleasure to be found in the three works of Op 44 – the product of a composer at the top of his game. Among the gems are the tender slow movement of No 1; the airborne *Scherzo* of No 2; and the *Adagio non troppo* of No 3, which adds a note of poignancy to a quartet of which Mendelssohn was particularly fond.

Cherubini Quartet



4 *Cello Sonata No 2, Op 58*

Chandos Ⓢ CHAN10701 (12/11)

It's Mendelssohn's younger brother Paul whom we have to thank for

his contribution to the cello repertoire, for both the sonatas and the *Variations concertantes* were written for him. The Second Sonata sets off with an ebullience akin to the *Italian* Symphony, and the energy of the outer movements is counterpointed by the sonorous poetry of the *Adagio*. It's another Paul who particularly impresses in this work: Paul Watkins – with his sibling Huw at the piano.

Paul Watkins vc Huw Watkins pf



5 *String Quintet No 2, Op 87*

EMI Ⓢ 557799-2 (11/04)

The neglect of the Second Quintet, written in 1845, seems inexplicable.

It's every bit the equal of the string quintets of Schubert and Brahms and, like the latter, Mendelssohn adds a second viola to the standard quartet. There's a euphoric quality to the outer movements, while the slow movement is a study in minor-hued intensity. The version by Christian Tetzlaff and friends from Lars Vogt's Spannungen festival is hard to beat.

Christian Tetzlaff, Isabelle Faust vns

Stefan Fehlandt, Hartmut Rohde vs Gustav Rivinius vc



6 *Piano Trio No 2, Op 66*

Pentatone Ⓢ PTC5186 085 (10/06)

Six years separate this trio from

the First (which is better known, though the Second was in fact championed as early as 1925 by Sammons, Murdoch and Squire). This modern-day recording blends mystery and tempestuousness in the first movement, and brings to the *Scherzo* an irresistible youthful fizz. There's a real meeting of hearts and minds between these three top soloists.

Julia Fischer vn Daniel Müller-Schott vc

Jonathan Gilad pf



3 *String Quartet No 6, Op 80*

ASV Gold Ⓢ GLD4025 (5/07)

Why this quartet doesn't give Mendelssohn a status as

a composer of quartets comparable with Schubert's seems hard to fathom. This is the last of his six quartets, written in response to the death of his beloved sister Fanny, and it's the rawness of its grief that continues to shock. The Elias Quartet lay bare its intensity, from the opening gestures that rip through the air through to the swirling unease of the finale.

Elias Quartet



2 *Octet, Op 20*

Onyx Classics Ⓢ ONYX4060 (2/11)

Does Mendelssohn's most famous chamber work really belong in

a 'Specialist's Guide'? Well, it would be perverse to leave it out merely because of its fame and it is – as any string player will concur – one of the greatest works in the repertoire. Everyone has their own favourite version, but Ehnes and the Seattle Chamber Music Society combine a like virtuosity with an acute sensitivity towards the inner lines as well as the soaring first violin part.

James Ehnes vn Seattle Chamber Music Society

1 *String Quartet No 2, Op 13*

Astrée Ⓢ E8622 (9/98)



This piece (which, despite its numbering, was Mendelssohn's first quartet), written by a teenager, is remarkable for the anguished depths it plumbs and for the composer's innate mastery of the genre. It's no coincidence that it was written in the year of Beethoven's death: Mendelssohn made a thorough study of his great forebear's quartets, but, unlike many of his fellow composers, he was energised rather than cowed by his legacy, seizing the gauntlet with enthusiasm. Quatuor Mosaïques, with gut strings and little vibrato, lend a particular poignancy to a masterpiece that deserves the ubiquity of the Octet.

Quatuor Mosaïques



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THE GRAMOPHONE COLLECTION

Fantastical, dreamlike... and intrinsically French

Interpretations of **Debussy's String Quartet in G minor, Op 10** go back to the early days of recording. **Caroline Gill** seeks out those ensembles that fully capture the music's fluidity, freedom and Frenchness

Debussy's String Quartet – if ever there was a piece not to be fiddled about with or overplayed, this is it.

The only one of his pieces ascribed an opus number (10, possibly randomly), its outward appearance of conventionality is misleading and belies one of the most radical and prophetic chamber pieces of the 19th century – a fantastical French version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and a foreshadowing of *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* (written a year later in 1894 and the piece which brought Debussy properly to the forefront). Perhaps that was intentional: it's exciting to think that Debussy may have deliberately hidden this piece behind a façade of respectability to see who had enough imagination to find the delights that lay beyond the title. Just that squeak of a possibility is enough to propel the listener into a full apprehension of the importance of this piece, both in the context of Debussy's own life and career, and in terms of the direction that chamber music was to take on the doorstep of a new century.

Debussy had spent a lot of his childhood and adolescence away from home, separated from his family either by war, or by his studies and subsequent study tours. The two years he spent in Italy as a student were conventional but inappropriate for a composer as irrepressibly French as Debussy,

and he returned home saying to his friends that 'any sounds in combination and in any succession are henceforth free to be used in a musical continuity'. He certainly practised what he preached with his quartet – there is no Haydnesque A–B–A form here, but rather an evolution of a single theme without any proper restatements or developments as Haydn would have known them. It's not even particularly Impressionistic (a term that Debussy hated to have applied to him), but more Symbolistic: Debussy tries to invoke deeper meanings, rather than describe them explicitly, and avoids any representations that could be described as matter-of-fact. This creates a fluidity in the sound and the imagery that even extends to the score – the running semiquavers and triplets look fluid, like a shimmering brook flowing across the page at differing rates.

THE MUSIC'S HEART

Everything that is so intrinsically French about the Debussy Quartet is written directly into its DNA, but that isn't to say that it is unimpeachable, or indestructible. One of the great beauties of this piece is its constantly shifting shape: a gently morphing mirage that will disappear as soon as the listener – or, more importantly, the performer – tries to touch or hold it. Since recording began, string quartets have been trying to work out whether to try to contain this free-spirited music or to leave well

alone, and although it is hard to know which is the better approach, it is unassailable that, even after the passing of the best part of a century, one of the most beguiling performances remains an early one, that by the **Pro Arte Quartet**.

The group was formed when Debussy was still alive, and recorded his Quartet in 1933 in a performance that still excites (if the recording was still available, it would be one of my top choices). Perhaps the players' proximity to Debussy is what makes it sound as if the music is in their blood – it is a compelling option, if the main aim of any performance is to get to the heart of the music itself. The standard of both the tuning and quality of sound is remarkably high, and one can listen without applying the 'listening to a historic recording' filter that can often lead to artistically important performances being treated in a patronising way.

In so many ways it is the colour that defines this piece – it is as important as the notes and interpretation, in the same way that the string colour of a Bruckner symphony is as intrinsic a part of the identity of the music as the notes themselves. The instrumental permutations that Debussy offers are so atmospheric, and even spooky (almost in the manner of the early French cinema of the Lumière brothers), that the colours they make are vital. This is in the fibre of the Pro Arte recording, which is made all the more striking by the fact that by the time of the 1951 **Stuyvesant Quartet** recording



PHOTOGRAPHY: HENRI MANUEL/GETTY IMAGES

Façade of respectability: Debussy's only string quartet has an outward appearance of conventionality, but this belies one of the most radical chamber pieces of the 19th century

that sense was lost. The latter sounds more like the soundtrack of a 1950s Hollywood movie, with erratic speeds that cause a loss of any sense of the piece's thematic evolution, and the seamless movement of sections in and out of each other ending up sounding inconsistent and hard to follow.

The **Juilliard Quartet's** recording of 1960 displays a hearteningly more direct line back to the Pro Arte than the Stuyvesant one, though its inherent problems are similar – despite clean lines that you can almost hear as polyphonic. The remastering brings the same feel as the Stuyvesant Quartet's recording – a proper deadening of the sound; but if you can get beyond that to see that the performance really is about the heart of the music, you can allow yourself to be brought closer to it and be the richer for it, especially in the brusque final movement, which is so relevant to its jazz roots.

SOUND QUALITY ISN'T EVERYTHING

One of the beauties of the embarrassment of riches there is to consider when browsing through recordings of this piece is that recording quality doesn't necessarily need to be a consideration for all but the most intense purists. The work's dreamlike quality means that absolute clarity of sound, unless carefully controlled, can actually play against it. This levels the playing field for some great recordings to weather their status through the storm of improving recording quality, leaving many listeners still as in love with, say, the 1966 recording by the **Quartetto Italiano** in 2012 as they were in the year it was released. Although this particular performance is more impetuous than others, it creates a unique atmosphere. Their big chords about three minutes into the first movement, for instance, sound a little more like foot-stamping than those played by their French, or even English or American, counterparts; but, overall, it's so personal that of all the recordings available this

is the one that attracts the most loyalty over the longest period.

The Mediterranean hot-bloodedness of the Quartetto Italiano is echoed nearly 40 years later by the Spanish **Cuarteto Casals** to a similar satisfying effect, thus providing a realistic alternative to Italiani-loyal listeners. The whole performance of the Casals is irresistible: it brings us close to treading an other-worldly Mediterranean feeling, and here the foot-stamping is decidedly more Gallic in style, and more enticing than distracting. The sheer homogeneity of their sound allows the music to kaleidoscope from colour to colour, especially in the opening of the second movement. In almost every recording available, the flow of the music is brought up short at this point by the aggression of the gamelan-invoking opening chords. Of course, they are marked *sforzando* and *forte*, but there are limits, which the vast majority of recordings fail to observe, and it is here that the Cuarteto Casals in particular invoke, through quality and colour, the Lumière brothers and their early French cinema (something that makes the Pro Arte recording so irresistible).

Perhaps it is the lack of fashionableness of the performances by ensembles such as the Quartetto Italiano and the Cuarteto Casals that have put in place recordings that will last for generations. The Symbolism that inspired Debussy is a reaction against unpalatable realism. The composer is a refugee from reality here, and any recording's main challenge is to keep the music's unbroken forward motion without losing hold of its style or French integrity. Maybe this is something of which groups are particularly conscious: there is an extraordinary conformity in recordings when it comes to tempo and articulation. The fact that Debussy uses broadly specific metronome markings is a red herring – but the notable few performances that push the boundaries of tempo rarely manage to do so without the music crumbling under their fingers, as it

does in the performance of the **Quatuor Sine Nomine** (2008). The speed here is so fast that the runs in the first movement almost slip out from under the players' fingers. The pulling around of the notes themselves (almost like the 'lemoning' more at home in Renaissance choral music, where there is a *crescendo* and *diminuendo* within the space of a single note) and the insertion of small hold-ups between notes are unnecessarily thick markers outlining the section changes, and stall the evolution of the piece. That is not to say that it never works to stretch the tempi or underline the articulation – it works beautifully in the recording of the **Dante Quartet** (2009), whose performance displays similar lemoning to that by Quatuor Sine Nomine, along with *tenutos* that can make the listener feel as though someone's prodding them in the arm as they're dropping off to sleep; but the point is that it is a fundamentally more dreamlike performance. The viola voice in this quartet is particularly redolent of English folk music (especially at the start of the second section of the third movement, punctuated by the folky open fifths in the chords of the other parts), and this finds a natural home with the Dante Quartet.

STAYING TRUE TO THE NOTES

The sensuality, tonal shifts and evolutionary structure are all divorced from the rules of Classical harmony; through a single piece, Debussy redirected chamber music (Boulez said that Debussy freed the genre from 'rigid structure, frozen rhetoric and rigid aesthetics'). But it is more than that – Debussy's String Quartet is a fantasy, and as such needs no bumps or potholes in the performance to jerk the listener out of that state. Everything that is necessary for an artistically sound performance is in the notes on the page; anything which ties it to a particular period, or fashion of performance, plays a dangerous game – which is why the houses in particular of the Quartetto Italiano, the Cuarteto Casals and



MOST DREAMLIKE

Dante Quartet

Hyperion © CDA67759

A performance that sounds like a fantastical improvisation, despite intense attention to detail and minute treatment of the dynamic markings.



MOST PASSIONATE

Cuarteto Casals

Harmonia Mundi © ② HMG50 8390/91

The Cuarteto Casals tread an irresistible line between reserve and old-fashioned Mediterranean passion, making this a close contender for Overall Choice.



MOST TRADITIONAL

Quartetto Italiano

Philips Eloquence © 464 3602

An alternative to the best modern recordings, this doesn't try to be too ethereally French, staying true to its own identity and warm tone.



The Belgian Pro Arte Quartet c1935: founded in Debussy's lifetime and among the earliest of his champions

the Dante Quartet are built on rock. Similarly, the 2001 recording by the **Belcea Quartet** stays very shy of any form of excess or fashion and will last for generations as a result.

The **Chilingirian Quartet**, mentors of the Belcea Quartet, produced an interesting recording in 1984. There are oases in it that are so ethereal that they make up for periods of heavy-handedness which end up as opportunities for contrast. This is particularly obvious in the first movement, but by the second the mood has become wholly fantastical, where the listener can feel that the character of the piece has been completely understood. All this is despite an intense clarity of sound, which could push the recording into clinical territory. The all-important third movement fully pushes the performance into proper limpid beauty.

And the third movement is indeed all-important, forming the litmus test for any performance of this piece. It is the deepest

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

DATE / ARTISTS

1933	Pro Arte Quartet
1951	Stuyvesant Quartet
1960	Juilliard Quartet
1966	Quartetto Italiano
1979	Melos Quartet
1983	Orlando Quartet
1984	Alban Berg Quartet
1984	Chilingirian Quartet
1984	Emerson Quartet
1991	Quatuor Ysaÿe
1993	Quatuor Alcan
2000	Belcea Quartet
2003	Auryn Quartet
2005	Cuarteto Casals
2008	Quatuor Ebène
2008	Quatuor Sine Nomine
2009	Acies Quartet
2009	Dante Quartet
2010	Arcanto Quartet

RECORD COMPANY (REVIEW DATE)

Biddulph Recordings (P LAB105 (6/96 - n/a)
Bridge (P BRIDGE9137 (7/65*))
Testament (P SBT1375 (9/05)
Philips Eloquence (B 464 3602 (10/88*))
Deutsche Grammophon (P 419 7502GH (10/87)
Philips (P 411 0502PH (4/84*))
EMI Classics (M 085202-2 (8/86)
EMI Classics for Pleasure (P 382231-2 (5/84)
Deutsche Grammophon (P 427 3202GH (4/90)
Decca (P 430 4342DH (10/91)
Analekta fleur de lys (P AN2 3019
EMI Classics (B 574020-2 (4/01)
Tacet (P D118 (6/03)
Harmonia Mundi (B ② HMG50 8390/91 (7/05*))
Virgin Classics (M 519045-2 (12/08)
Genuin (P GEN89141
Gramola (P GRAM98843
Hyperion (P CDA67759 (6/10)
Harmonia Mundi (P HMC90 2067 (11/10)

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Bruckner	Symphony No.9	Berlin Phil., Rattle	£11.50
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Schumann	Piano Concerto etc.	Angela Hewitt, Lintu	£11.00
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Near Luzancy, 1893: Debussy seated, with (L-R) Mme Chausson, Ernest Chausson and Raymond Bonheur

part of the journey before the more playful final movement starts to bring the listener swimming upwards to consciousness. The central moment is about two-thirds of the way in (at bar 77), when the first violin moves down a whole tone from a top G sharp to F sharp. The whole movement – indeed, quartet – prepares for that single moment of dissolution. It is here, more than anywhere, that Debussy's commitment to his own identity as a Symbolist, rather than an Impressionist, is obvious: you cannot use a sledgehammer to crack a nut in this music – if you do, the image is shattered. The handling of this moment by the Dante Quartet is triumphantly understated, as it is by the Belceas. The performance by Cuarteto Casals can be contrasted with the only pull-up to this point that I have heard which actually manages to prepare it, rather than stalling its appearance.

Despite some very obvious edits, the 1979 recording by the **Melos Quartett** is almost unsurpassable for its atmosphere and build-up of tension and surprise (they infuse the second movement with a coquettishness which is rare to hear – although there is an unmistakable 'swing' in the second movement from the Belcea Quartet – and which is an appealingly natural way for that movement to sound). Their third movement is warm and comforting, and they control that vital build-up well – despite inexplicably holding it up and therefore stalling it at *très expressif*.

It's a fine line to tread, and some quartets – while sticking with the consensus of tempo and articulation – do not manage to move the piece on from impersonal and efficient. In their 1984 recording, the **Alban Berg Quartett** find it hard to move from this line, although they retain

a tempting French style, keeping the forward momentum of the music without distorting it. There is a small kernel of recordings from the late 1980s and early 1990s which seem oddly lacking in personality in this way. The 1983 version of the **Orlando Quartet** doesn't find an equilibrium until very late in the piece, and records with such a bright sound that one is jerked out of the Vaseline-lensed fantasy world so necessary for this piece. Similarly, the performance by the **Quatuor Alcan**, recording in 1993 and usually so stunning in performances of the cornerstones of chamber music, feels a bit glib. But a notable exception is the **Emerson Quartet** (1986), whose rich and warm playing eats up any aggression and creates a strongly avuncular character, which isn't entirely unappealing: the parallel chords that run through the piece almost create a parallel universe in this performance and the contrasts they make are careful to kaleidoscope rather than jolt.

The **Quatuor Ysaÿe**, though, has a unique heritage, and the group's 1991 recording has an unaccountable taste to it. The original Ysaÿe Quartet premiered the Quartet in December 1893, and this recording has the same quality as the early recordings of the piece, made close to Debussy. It sounds as if it is being recorded from the next room, which on many levels isn't terribly appealing, but it keeps the dreamy Frenchness under control, as if one is looking at the music through a gossamer-thin layer. The players also make it clear, without being too pushy, how the piece is structured, giving a strong sense of being on some kind of fantastical journey. Above all, their performance of the cardinal third movement brings out the way it passes broken pieces of songs around the parts, as if Debussy were quoting directly from the Verlaine poetry that played such a strong role in defining him as a Symbolist when he returned to France.

FRENCH DIRECTION

But is heritage really the only thing that can give a performance of this piece the gravitas – or, at least, validity – it needs? Certainly, two accomplished and beautifully recorded 21st-century versions by the **Auryn Quartet** (2003) and **Acles Quartet** (2009) can bring the listener almost to the point of believing that their sort of strenuous playing is the way to go. But given that this work is one of the first French string quartets to sound properly French rather than expounding the virtues and characteristics of the German model, ridding a performance of any hint of Teutonicism should be respectfully high on a group's list of musical priorities. So shouldn't that mean that the 2008 recording by the **Quatuor Ebène** is the best? Perhaps, but although it won the *Gramophone* Recording of the Year in 2009, I am sadly not a fan. This piece is not

only important for creating a crossroads in chamber music, but because it represents a moment when Debussy began to lash out in terms of his musical influences. The **Ebène** players have the perfect pedigree to honour this, practised as they are in playing music by composers (such as Stravinsky, Takemitsu, Reich and Herbie Hancock) whose styles emulate the eclecticism of Debussy; yet the conflation of these influences within one performance creates an earthbound quality that is overplayed and that feels, to me, clumsy. In fact, it is the non-French combination of the **Arcanto Quartett** that creates the perfect balance of dimly lit clarity in a recording that is impossible to turn off once started. They manage a beautifully warm sound without falling into the trap of making the romantic either self-indulgent or just plain aggressive, and absorb the complicated elements of Debussy's composition – the bitorality, the modulations, the total lack of any sense of key-centricity, as well as Debussy's general harmonic belligerence – without question or judgement. They allow the work to live and breathe for itself.

The Frenchness is already sewn into the lining of this piece: the skill in non-French recordings is how they allow the music to breathe as French, and to defer to it. It is extraordinary to think that so many composers used the string quartet as a vehicle by which to hone and concentrate their musical ideas, but that Debussy wrote a single example, repointed the genre into the 20th century, and then set aside the form for the rest of his life. To find a recording worthy of this uncontainable piece is to find a group whose collective imaginations are as fertile and soaring as Debussy's own. **G**



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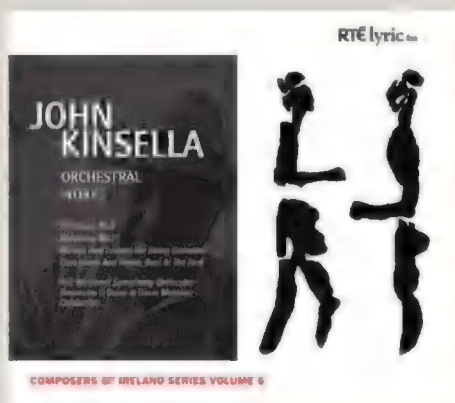


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MUSICAL JOURNEYS

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Petrenko braves Prague

It takes nerves of steel to take on the Prague Spring Festival's first-night performance of *Má vlast*, writes **Adrian Mourby**



Tradition: the Czech Phil have played *Má vlast* to open the festival since 1948

The big challenge of the Prague Spring Festival is invariably its opening. Apart from one or two occasions in the 1940s, the three-week festival has always begun with *Má vlast* in Smetana Hall. This piece of televised nationalistic ritual, given in the presence of the President of the Czech Republic, goes far beyond music-making. Smetana's six symphonic poems double as a statement of Czech identity, so how can they also be fresh and musically satisfying? The answer has been to vary the orchestra and conductor. This year the Czech Philharmonic – who first performed *Má vlast* at the Prague Spring Festival in 1948 under Rafael Kubelík, one of the festival founders – was back but this time under the baton of Vasily Petrenko, chief conductor of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra.

Petrenko freely admitted he had never conducted the work before, but this did not stop him positively bounding on to the podium to take his place below the large gold medallion of Smetana. 'I have conducted its individual parts,' he explained beforehand. 'I have listened to all the recordings, but that is not to say I won't try to contribute something of my own.' In the event the 35-year-old conducted the final two movements (bloated late additions by Smetana) with a vitality that matched the promise of the opening poem, 'Vyšehrad', and the much-loved lyricism of 'Vltava'.

'The Czech Philharmonic have been performing *Má vlast* for years,' said Petrenko. 'And it's not been easy to persuade them to look at it from a new perspective. Tradition can be good and I'm not opposed to it. It can, however, be bad if it conforms to the players' and conductors' desire to be comfortable. I always strive to improve the orchestra's performance. When it comes to the opening concert of the Prague Spring Festival, I have promised it will not be entirely traditional.'

The response was positive among the 1200-strong audience. When the President rose, a standing ovation gradually overtook the hall and Petrenko had to wave goodbye to signal that he would not be returning to the podium again. The festival gives concerts in

13 venues, including five of the city's Baroque churches. The Czech pianist Ivan Moravec, a stickler for checking the tuning of his piano, clocked up his 20th festival appearance with a programme of personal favourites: Debussy and Chopin augmented by Ravel and Mozart. Moravec performed at the Rudolfinum, the venue where he recently celebrated his 80th birthday.

Another Czech octogenarian, composer Marek Kopelent, was honoured at the Convent of St Agnes, one of his favourite acoustics. Kopelent became a musical *persona non grata* during the period of 'normalisation' that followed Prague's failed liberal reforms of 1968. The idea of An Evening With Marek Kopelent grew out of an initial

'Tradition can be good, but not if it conforms to the desire to be comfortable'

– Petrenko

approach from the festival to perform three of his string quartets. In the end, the composer curated a celebration of his own work that included two new pieces specially written for this year's festival.

Three world premieres this year were part of an adventurous tribute to John Cage staged among the old motor cars and aeroplanes of the National Technical Museum. Other highlights included Daniel Barenboim conducting the Vienna Philharmonic in three Mozart symphonies, the St Petersburg Philharmonic performing Dvořák's *New World* Symphony, Edita Gruberova in an evening of Italian and French arias at the Rudolfinum, and six operas given at various locations across the city. In its 67 years, Prague Spring Festival has clearly established itself as one of the most international in Europe.

War Requiem recreated

Michael White visits Coventry Cathedral to hear an anniversary performance of Britten's powerful work

Coventry, like Dresden, is a place of post-war conscience where the past hangs heavy on the present. Bombed to near-oblivion in 1940, much as Dresden was in 1945, it resurfaced and is now a bricks-and-mortar symbol of world reconciliation.

But where Dresden has turned itself into a handsome city, Coventry has not. You walk out of the station into a depressing parody of urban planning. And yet, trapped by flyovers and shopping precincts is something Coventry can be proud of: its cathedral, consecrated 50 years ago in 1962 amid a festival to celebrate the post-war arts.

As the cathedral was itself a statement of creative Britain at that time, with architecture by Basil Spence, an East-wall tapestry by Graham Sutherland and glass by John Piper, so the attendant festival involved a summatory package of musical premieres, including Tippett's *King Priam* and Britten's *War Requiem* – which, in spite of problems at the first performance, proved a landmark of contemporary choral writing.

Half a century on, the cathedral decided to celebrate its anniversary with a performance of the *War Requiem* on the day of the original premiere, May 30. And I travelled up for it, joining the great, good

NEW RELEASES

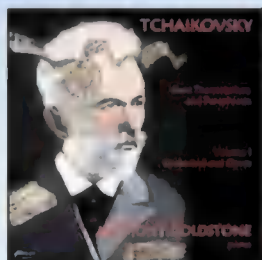
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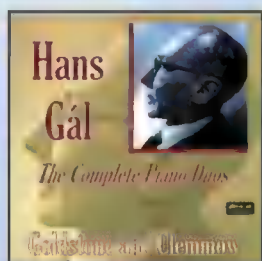
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and merely devoted who had arrived like pilgrims from across the UK for what promised to be an Event.

Among the devoted was a woman who had driven 200 miles with no ticket, in the hope of finding one. Among the great was Sir Brian MacMaster, former boss of the Edinburgh Festival, who told me he'd been here in 1962 and remembered the occasion vividly but had forgotten the building. 'It's not wearing well,' he said. I half agreed.

The truth is, Coventry Cathedral is so much a period piece it can't look anything but dated. There's no definition to its shape. The seating seems intended for an early episode of *The Avengers* ('certainly not for long sermons,' I was told by the current Dean, John Irvine, 'it's

'Britten complained that the cathedral had a lousy acoustic – it still does'

horribly uncomfortable'). And the tapestry is looking shabby. But to anyone like me, brought up on photo-images of 1962, with Peter Pears at the lectern and Britten pacing up and down the nave, the place still has a certain energy and meaning. And I struggled to connect with both. The main problem was a lack of visual re-creation, because the performance took place at the West end, not the East. And if, as I was told, the reason for this 180-degree turnabout was acoustical, it didn't work. One of Britten's complaints in 1962 was that the cathedral had a lousy acoustic. It still does, any which way around.

Another irony was that the orchestra here was the CBSO, just as it was in 1962 when Britten dismissed the band as 'second-rate' and refused to allow its principal players to form the solo-status chamber group the score requires. It's obviously improved, because it played here with impactful force and made a point of having its own players in the chamber group. Where they were unimpeachable. I don't think

The insider's guide

Gramophone selects August's unmissable musical events

1 New York, Saratoga Performing Arts Center

The Philadelphia Orchestra's summer residency runs from August 1-18, featuring: music director designate Yannick Nézet-Séguin; conductors Gianandrea Noseda and Stéphane Denève; pianist Lang Lang; and cellist Yo-Yo Ma. spac.org

2 São Paulo, Sala São Paulo

The São Paulo Symphony conducted by Richard Armstrong perform Bartók's *Four Pieces for Orchestra*, Janáček's *Sinfonietta* and Mozart's Piano Concerto No 19 with soloist Marc-André Hamelin on August 2, 3 and 4. osesp.art.br

2 London, Riverside Studios

Tête à Tête: The Opera Festival runs from August 2-19 as a forum for opera companies and individual artists to present their work. The festival this year includes John McLeod's *Thrashing the Sea God*, and new football opera *All To Play For*. tete-a-tete.org.uk

3 Lanaudière, Fernand Lindsay Amphitheatre

The Montreal Symphony Orchestra

conducted by Kent Nagano perform Brahms's First Symphony and Mozart's Piano Concerto No 21 with soloist André Laplante as part of this year's Lanaudière Festival in Canada. lanaudiere.org

7 Los Angeles, Hollywood Bowl

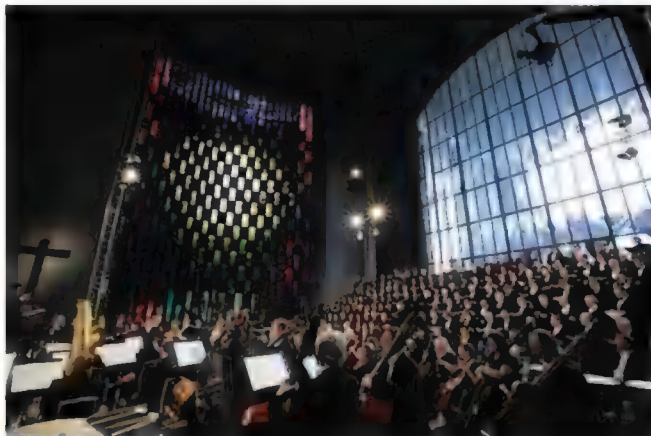
Gustavo Dudamel conducts the LA Phil in Tchaikovsky's Symphony No 4 and Schumann's Cello Concerto, joined by soloist Yo-Yo Ma. hollywoodbowl.com

9 Weymouth, Pavilion

The Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra conducted by Rui Pinheiro perform two Proms-style concerts on August 9 and 10 including works by Bernstein, Mahler, Rodgers & Hammerstein, Walton, Elgar and Parry. bsolive.com

10 Belfast, Zoo

NI Opera presents Britten's *Noye's Fludde* at Belfast Zoo on August 10, 11, 12, 17, 18 and 19 as part of the London 2012 Festival. Working with the KT Wong Foundation, the production features children from Northern Ireland's Chinese community. niopera.com



Period piece: Coventry Cathedral, the same venue visited by Britten in 1962

Britten would have cherished Andris Nelsons's speeds (interminably slow); and though Mark Padmore's fiercely cultivated eloquence was perfect casting, the two other soloists – Hanno Müller-Brachmann and Erin Wall – had less to offer. But the CBSO Chorus turned out to be masters of the prophylactic holding-back that is, I think, the secret of success in this piece (you don't indulge the opportunities for pandemonium until the *Liberate me*, then only briefly). And the sense of occasion was strong. I was glad to be present.

But there was also a sense of paradox that bothered me as I came back to London on the train; and it was that hearing the *War Requiem* in the sacred space for which it was commissioned, it sounded more secular and less spiritual than I'd ever thought before. Britten's relationship with God was complicated. Never more so, I now realise, than in this piece. ●

11 Zeist, Evangelische Broedergemeente Church

The 23rd edition of Ziest Music Days, an international chamber music festival based in the Netherlands, runs from August 11 to 25, with appearances from the Jerusalem Quartet, Cuarteto Casals, the Mondrian Trio, and cellist Natalie Clein. zeistmusicdays.nl

16 Inverness, Eden Court

The Scottish Chamber Orchestra perform Prokofiev's *Classical* Symphony and Beethoven's First Symphony under director-violinist Isabelle van Keulen, plus Mozart's Clarinet Concerto with soloist Maximiliano Martín. (Also in Perth on August 17 and Dumfries on August 18.) sco.org.uk

18 Singapore, Esplanade

The Singapore SO conducted by Lan Shui perform Beethoven's Symphony No 3 and Rachmaninov's Piano Concerto No 1 with Yevgeny Sudbin. sso.org.sg

27 Milan, Teatro alla Scala

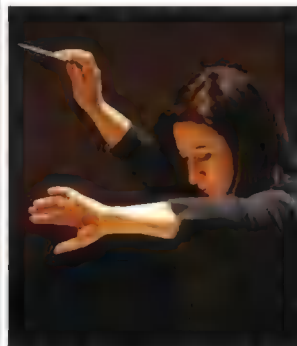
Daniel Barenboim conducts the Orchestra and Chorus of La Scala in Verdi's *Requiem*, featuring soprano Anja Harteros, mezzo Elina Garanča, tenor Jonas Kaufmann and bass René Pape. teatroallascala.org

EVENT OF THE MONTH

August 9

Sydney, Opera House

The Sydney Symphony Orchestra recreates its first official Opera House concert from 1973. That performance featured soprano Birgit Nilsson and conductor Sir Charles Mackerras in an all-Wagner programme, including excerpts from *Die Meistersinger*, *Tannhäuser*, *Tristan und Isolde* and *Götterdämmerung*. This time conductor Simone Young and soprano Christine Brewer appear. sydneysymphony.com



Nostalgia: Simone Young and the SSO

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AUGUST'S TEST DISCS



A true challenge for the ability of any system, this set of Vivaldi arias by Roberta Invernizzi on Glossa combines bell-like vocals and superb accompaniment



The simplicity of Steven Osborne's Beethoven Bagatelles on Hyperion will tell you all you need to know about your system's clarity and control



Harnoncourt's 'Walzer Revolution' project on Sony Classical takes some beating: the period instruments of Concentus Musicus Wien sound gorgeous

Digital options for audio keep on expanding

Andrew Everard looks at some of the latest product launches and sees flexibility increasing

As you can read elsewhere in these pages this month, I recently paid a very rapid visit to Onkyo HQ in Japan to find out more about its plans for a streaming music service and how the company sees audio in the home evolving. Much of what I was shown remains under wraps but it was heartening to see two new stereo amplifiers aimed at the sub-£500 market, and tuned with an ear to European tastes in listening.

The two new models are virtually identical, except one will have a built-in digital-to-analogue converter to which sources including computers can be connected. Profitability plays a big part in that thinking.

Digital also plays a part in the Heed Audio system tested this month, with a top-notch CD transport/DAC providing the source for the company's excellent si mkII integrated amplifier. However, you can also buy the amp with a digital input should you want, and that's a trend carried through to its natural conclusion in the new NAD: the £2000 C 390DD Direct Digital DAC/amplifier.

The incoming signal is processed and amplified in the digital domain right up to the speaker outputs, allowing the company to describe it as 'a DAC that amplifies'. Delivering 150W per channel, it has a range of options, including one adding analogue inputs to its eight standard digital ones.

Meanwhile, the range of devices available to take digital content and feed it through the hi-fi continue to expand. Arcam, which launched the first offboard DAC – its first 'Black Box' – way back in 1985, has recently added the rPAC, a USB-connected DAC/headphone amplifier selling for £150. Able to be used with Windows 7/XP or Mac OS X computers without extra drivers, and powered from the computer, the rPAC has both a headphone output and stereo line-outs.



One of the best-known offboard converters of recent times, the Cambridge Audio DacMagic, has spawned two new versions: the upgraded DacMagic Plus and the more affordable DacMagic 100. The former is a £350 hotrod version of the original, complete with a volume control and balanced outputs, so it could be used directly into a power amplifier or active speakers, the latter a compact £200 version of the original with significant internal upgrades.

And, with an eye to a growing trend, the DacMagic Plus is one of several models able to be used with the company's BT100 Bluetooth receiver, to allow not just iPhones, iPads and iPod Touch devices to send music wirelessly, but also to work with any Bluetooth-enabled component, including laptop computers and a variety of smartphones.

It's just another part of the future of digital audio in the home. **G**

- 1** Digital made simple: the **Arcam rPac** combines digital-to-analogue conversion and a headphone amplifier, and has 'plug-and-play' operation
- 2** **Onkyo** plays it simple with its two new European-tuned amplifiers, though the more expensive of the pair comes with digital inputs
- 3** Digital through to the speaker outputs, this is the new **NAD C 390DD** amplifier
- 4** The **Cambridge Audio DacMagic Plus** is a highly tuned version of the popular original model...
- 5** ...while the **Cambridge Audio DacMagic 100** is a compact, highly affordable model

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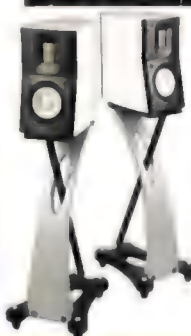
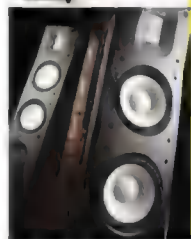
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REVIEW PRODUCT OF THE MONTH

Heed Audio Obelisk system

The name may be unfamiliar but there's solid audio heritage here, says **Andrew Everard**

Unless you happen to be Hungarian, you may be unfamiliar with the Heed Audio name, even though the company has been in business for 25 years. It started out as a distributor, mainly handling British brands in the Hungarian market, but fairly soon was working with British designer Richard Hay of Ion Systems, maker of iconic amplifiers of the 1990s, including the original Obelisk model.

Heed began making the shoe-box-shaped Obelisk, which proved a hit in Hungary, but eventually Ion Systems founded and Hay left the audio business for a while. Heed, however, continued to make amplifiers and other products, carrying on the spirit of the original Ion designs. In time, Hay's son Robert took on the role of UK distributor for the products, and now Hay Senior is back on board, distributing the product in the UK, acting as a consultant to Heed Audio and coming up with some new designs.

And the lineage from the original Obelisk products to the current is easy to see: the current components are all 'half width' units, available in standard black, but also in white, Hay reasoning that 'Apple's dominance of the portable computer market and the increase in hi-fi retailers and installers specifying Mac Minis has seen white audio products becoming the norm in people's homes. Now, with the compact Heed Obelisk range available in a matching white finish, there is no need to sacrifice sound quality for aesthetic reasons.'

The Obelisk line is pretty exhaustive, as I discovered when I came to put this test together: I started out with the Obelisk si mkII integrated amplifier, which sells for £1290, but was soon persuaded that it was



worth adding the optional x2 power supply (£730), so called because it's actually two 300VA power supplies, one for each channel, in a single box. This takes over the supply to the amplifier's power stages, upping the output from 35W per channel to 50W a side.

At which point I received a press release about the latest upgrades to the £1300 Obelisk da digital-to-analogue converter, bringing USB 2.0 asynchronous operation and enabling it to handle 192kHz/24-bit files direct from a computer or other source. It's unusual in that it uses a conversion

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Finishes available (all units) Gloss black or white fascia, black main casework

Dimensions (WxHxD, all units) 22x8.5x36cm
heedaudio.co.uk

solution from Bristol company XMOS, using a programmable device rather than conventional converter chips, and a USB 2.0 card developed by Heed's Attila Oláh.

So one of those was ordered up and along with it came the company's matching dt CD transport (£1350). As an alternative, I could have specified the si mkII amplifier with either the dact 1.2 internal DAC card (a £265 dealer-fit option) or the £145 vinyl 1 moving magnet phono stage, while the range is rounded out by the Obelisk preamplifier (£1350, and upgradable with an ▶



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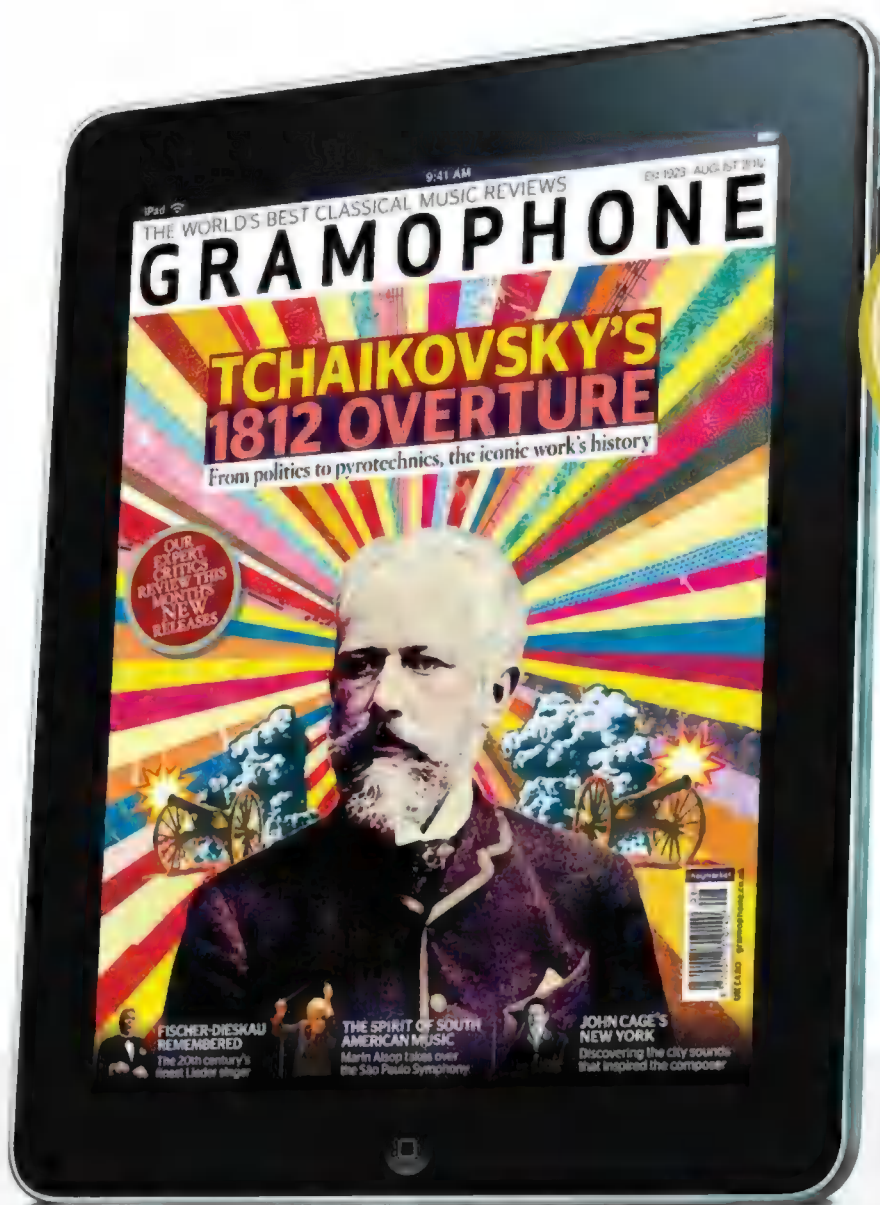
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SUGGESTED PARTNERS

A couple of affordable all-white speaker options to match the Heeds

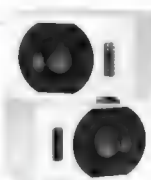
B&W 685

There's a new white finish for the long-running Bowers & Wilkins 685 speakers – at £399 they're the perfect budget choice to partner the Heeds



NEAT IOTA

They're tiny and perfect for use on shelves, wall-brackets or desktops but the little Neats, at around £650 a pair, are capable of a big, powerful sound



£880 px power supply), the 50W-per-channel ps stereo power amplifier (also £1350) or 60W pm monobloc amplifiers, at £1450 each. You can start small and then expand and upgrade as budgets and requirements allow.

PERFORMANCE

What immediately struck me about the Heed products was just how far away they are from stripped-down, tweaky hi-fi. The company's slogan is 'forget hi-fi – remember music!'

'The Heed Audio slogan is "forget hi-fi – remember music!" and the more time I spent with this system, the more I felt I "got it"'

and the components' simplicity of operation and real-world features – including five inputs on the amplifier, and remote control – make them easy to enjoy.

Connecting up the Heeds was entirely conventional: analogue interconnects from DAC to amplifier, digital from transport to DAC, USB from computer to DAC, and speaker cables from the amp to my speakers. The DAC, by the way, offers both buffered and non-buffered outputs, the former better used with passive preamplifiers and the like.

After a day or so of listening using the amplifier alone, I added on the optional power supply – and what a difference it makes! Playing 'solo', the si mkII has a wonderful sweetness and lightness of touch, more akin to the sound of a good valve amplifier than most of its solid-state competition; add on the power supply and you get even better control and dynamics allied to an increase in low-end punch – just the thing for a disc like the recent Harnoncourt 'Walzer Revolution' set, where the spring in the step of the sound is complemented by the slam in the bass. Never

in question was the Heeds' ability to drive and keep under control my PMC OB1 speakers but the little white amplifiers also sounded rather fine when I gave them a brief listen with some similarly small white speakers – Neat's Iotas. If you were looking for a small-room, Mac-matching system, the Heed si and the Neats would work very well.

Talking of computer-matching, the da converter – which until now had been doing a fine job harnessed to the dt transport –

now showed it was able to shine even more brightly when fed higher-resolution files via its USB input. And the amplification is more than up to showing what the converter can do, that combination of sweetness and sparkle in the top-end, absolute fluidity in the midband and warm but gutsy bass making the most of a wide range of recordings, whether from silver disc or hard disk storage.

That Heed Audio slogan, 'forget hi-fi – remember music!', may seem like marketing puff on first acquaintance but the more time I spent with the quartet of little white boxes, the more I felt I 'got' it. This is a system I found very easy to listen through, rather than to; and, rather than listening to tracks I know well to hear what the system was doing, I increasingly found myself playing whole works, and enjoying them very thoroughly.

I don't envy Heed Audio one little bit in trying to carve itself a niche in a market sector not exactly short of established brands and entrenched opinions, but the Obelisk products are definitely something very special and deserve to do very well indeed. **G**

DESIGN NOTES

Richard Hay

Heed Audio distributor and design consultant

On Neapolitan songs, and why there's more to digital than 1s and 0s

Richard Hay explains that the products we have here are 'the result of a long-term collaboration with the team at Heed Audio in Hungary of Miklós Lengyel, brothers Zsolt and Alpár Huszti and latterly their new engineer Attila Oláh'.

Hay says of the discs used in product-tuning that there are 'too many to name: musical evaluation has to be obtained from many different genres'. His mood tends to dictate what he uses but 'I'm not particularly fond of many of the very modern works: I find them rather strident and unmusical.'

His earliest musical influences? 'My father had a love of Tchaikovsky, Italian opera and Neapolitan folksongs.'

He counts among his memorable musical experiences 'seeing Shura Cherkassky playing the Tchaikovsky No 1 live in Bristol in the early '80s. I had a recording of his performance of the same work with the Berlin Philharmonic, inherited from my father.'

He adds: 'It is gratifying that people are now discovering that digital is not just all about 1s and 0s, but that many of the old disciplines of quality design, materials and components are just as important in the iPod age as in the days of vinyl – in fact, maybe even more so.'



'Design, materials and components are just as important in the iPod age'

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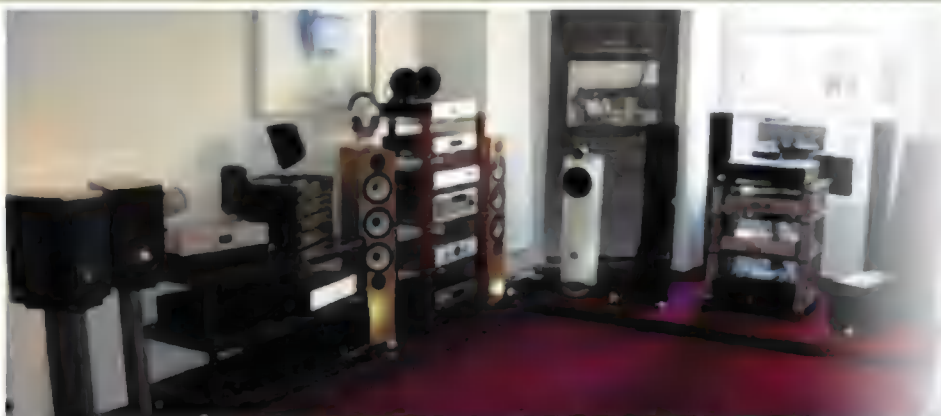
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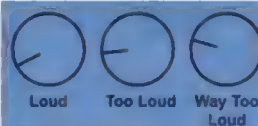
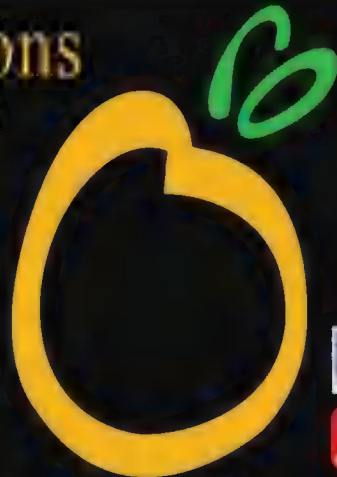
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REVIEW AUDIO PRO LV2E

Leather-clad wireless speakers aren't hidebound by convention

Active speakers with no-cable sound transmission and bags of style – what's not to like?

Swedish company Audio Pro last appeared in these pages in the 2011 Awards issue with its Living WF100 system, designed to send music wirelessly from a computer or audio system to a remote amplifier. As we said, 'This could just be the ideal *Gramophone* Player companion'.

The product we have here is even neater: the LV2e package, which sells for £700, contains everything you need to deliver high-quality audio from a computer. The 'front end' is the TX100 transmitter from the WF100 package, and this communicates directly with a pair of compact active speakers, with digital-to-analogue conversion, remote control and amplification built in.

Very cute the speakers are, too, and not just because the review pair was covered in red leather! Each contains 2x25W of Class D amplification, active crossovers (again in the digital domain) and wireless communications – unlike many other powered or active speaker systems, there's no need for a cable between the speakers. Each 'knows' whether it's left or right, and the right-hand speaker contains the control receiver and display for the credit-card-size remote handset.

The crossover optimises the signal for the drive units in each speaker, and extra speakers can be added to the network thanks to the choice of three 'House Codes' on transmitter and speakers. There's no limit to the number of speakers you can add, it's possible to set one of three 'Volume Zones' for complex systems and, if the 20m room-to-room range of the system isn't enough for you, there's a wireless extender available.



PERFORMANCE

All that's required to get the speakers up and running is a power cable to each enclosure and the selection of the transmitter as the sound output device on the computer to which the USB 'dongle' is attached.

The volume level on the right speaker goes up to 31 – this isn't a *Spinal Tap*-style 'amp goes to 11' thing but apparently because the gain from the amplifier divided into 2dB increments gave 31 steps! – but way before that there's enough sound to fill even quite large rooms with music.

The sound on offer is quite remarkable for boxes so compact (they stand just 21cm tall, and also come in black or white leather). There's enough power to play orchestral music without signs of dynamic compression and the refined, precise sound opens up recordings and shows superb levels of detail.

The LV2e speakers also have good weight and substance; but, should you want even more low-end punch, you can switch them

AUDIO PRO LV2E

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Accessories supplied Mains cables, remote handset, USB transmitter

Dimensions (speakers, HxWxD) 21x14.5x18cm
audiopro.com

from FR (full-range) to SAT (satellite) mode and use them with the wireless LV-SUB powered subwoofer (around £550).

You can even use the speakers as an extension for an existing audio system: the transmitter has a line-level input but you'll need to add a USB power supply in this mode.

While many will consider this as a study or second-room set-up, for those embracing computer audio and wanting a minimalist package this could well end up being the only music system required. I think it's worthy of unqualified recommendation. **Ⓢ**



HOW TO TEST...

To hear just what these speakers can do, load up the Chandos download of Elgar's Cello Concerto by Paul Watkins with the BBC Philharmonic and Andrew Davis, click the play button on your computer, sit back and let the glory of the recording wash over you.

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● ESSAY

'Onkyo has the will to make this happen but the licensing nightmare that is the music industry could well limit its progress...'

Reporting from Osaka, **Andrew Everard** sees a giant of home cinema putting its money where its music is with an enhanced high-resolution download service

The term 'flying visit' was true in both the literal and metaphorical senses: in order to spend a day and a half with Onkyo's engineers at their base in Osaka, Japan, I spent the better part of 20 hours travelling, door to door, each way.

Yet the time spent in the air and in airport lounges, plus the furious jet lag I'm not entirely sure I'd shaken off several days after my return, was more than worth it: far from being a company all about the 'crash bang' world of thrill-ride home cinema, Onkyo is getting back to its roots by turning its attention to equipment able to deliver 'HD' music to a very high standard.

The company – in rough terms, its name means 'sound harmony' – could have been forgiven for sticking to the AV arena. It's the AV receiver leader in several European markets – including the UK, where it has held that position for the past four years, has

'The e-Onkyo launch was beaten by iTunes by three days: "They had millions of tracks; we had 11!"'

a market share of 34.5 per cent, and last year sold some 34,000 receivers, increasing its sales 5 per cent in a sector down 12 per cent due to the current economic unpleasantness.

Neither is it doing too badly globally: since launching its first surround receivers back in 1987, it has shipped some 6.7m units, putting on a bit of a spurt in the past five years.

It has a tie-up with guitar-maker Gibson, which it hopes to use to improve its market penetration in the USA, and recently formed an alliance with TEAC, which will see the two companies pooling resources in distribution and – in all likelihood – production. A side effect of this last move should be greater prominence for TEAC's high-end Esoteric brand in the UK where it has been something of a well-kept secret for far too long.

However, there's another string to the Onkyo bow: it's called e-Onkyo, and it's

a music download service currently only available in Japan, but with global ambitions.

Launched in 2005 – 'we were beaten by iTunes by three days,' says e-Onkyo's Taku Kurosawa – the service started small: 'iTunes had millions of tracks; we had 11!'

Since then it has grown to the point where it now offers some 60,000 tracks: 15,000 of them in various forms of high-resolution, from 96kHz/24-bit and 192kHz/24-bit FLAC through to SACD quality DSD downloads, which can be played by many models in the company's recent ranges of AV receivers.

Now it's adding Dolby TrueHD audio-only downloads to its arsenal, allowing high-quality surround sound to be purchased, downloaded and played via Onkyo's latest midrange receivers, the TX-NR717 and TX-NR818.

The demonstrations given by the Onkyo engineers, using a laptop acting as a server, the TX-NR818 and a system of Monitor Audio speakers, certainly sounded impressive: we heard some music from some of the smaller specialist labels the company intends to offer via the service, which is already 'live' in Japan. These included tracks from Norwegian



New Onkyo models will offer HD audio streaming

audiophile label 2L, whose catalogue should be familiar to regular readers of these pages.

And while the team says it's in talks with major labels, it's likely that e-Onkyo will only have the big-label stuff for Japan. It has the will to make e-Onkyo happen as a global portal but the licensing nightmare that is the music industry could well halt progress.

That's something acknowledged by company vice president and chief operating officer Hiroshi Nakano, who suggests that, desirable though it would be to have big names and major labels on board worldwide, it's more likely that the e-Onkyo offering will involve smaller specialist labels. These include 2L, Japanese classical label Octavia and Germany's Nishimura, with Nakano saying it's likely the service will have a stronger classical bias simply because 'the copyright situation is easier'.

That won't get any argument from this quarter: in a market with limited classical music downloads at 'better than CD' resolution, any extra sources of content are more than welcome. And while Onkyo clearly has an agenda to complement current and forthcoming hardware with downloads its products can play, the fact that the portal will make available music in a variety of formats, with performances both familiar and unfamiliar, can only be good news. **G**



e-Onkyo: launched in Japan in 2005, it now has ambitions to make hi-res music available worldwide

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REVIEWS INDEX

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Anthony Andrews

From *Brideshead Revisited* to *My Fair Lady*, via film scores and Plácido Domingo, music has been a constant companion in the actor's life

My father was a musician. He did a lot of the arrangements for Vera Lynn in her heyday in the '40s and worked with all the major big bands – Jack Payne, Stanley Black, people like that. He had his own orchestra at one point at the Savoy and the Dorchester, when jazz was the thing in society in London. But he was classically trained so always yearned after his classical roots. He died when I was aged five but I have two great memories of him. One was his Steinway in our tiny house; it dwarfed the house somewhat. And the other was him arriving home with a drum for me – I think it was my birthday – so inevitably I became a very percussion-driven person. I did in fact become regimental corporal drummer in the Cadet Corps at the Royal Masonic School. About the same time I joined the school choir – we got to do all manner of performances, including a performance of Handel's *Messiah* at the Royal Albert Hall.

I adore going to concerts with great orchestras, which is a lovely privilege I learned about when at school. There were very few reasons why you could get an exeat. The school was near Watford, which had a hall where some pretty tickety-boo people would come and play, so, providing it was classical and educational, you could apply to go. So we did, particularly those who couldn't bear the thought of being in school another minute. So my big introduction to classical music was at Watford Town Hall. Great orchestras have always inspired me, which is why I'm absolutely delighted to play with John Wilson's little band of 119 (or whatever we're going to be!) when we perform *My Fair Lady* at the Proms. When I first came across him I couldn't get over the conduit that seemed to exist between him and his individual players. He seemed almost to be able to have a conversation with them during the piece, it was an extraordinary connection.

I've been very lucky, I've not only been able to watch a lot of great conductors, but Charles Mackerras was a great friend of mine, because he was a friend of my father. We lived for a while in the same street and I got to know him much better in the decade or two before he died. Charles was an inspiration to watch, an extraordinary man with a fantastic ability with an orchestra.

Probably the most creative environment I've ever spent time in is a recording studio. Something quite extraordinary happens whenever you go into a studio. I cherish that moment, particularly when you have the privilege of being the producer of a movie where you've employed a wonderful composer and in the first recording session all the musicians play the piece utterly perfectly first time – it just completely blows you away! Music is such a significant creative element in getting the seamless emotional experience on to that screen. Debbie Wiseman has composed for me quite a bit. She is so clever at reading individual characters and atmosphere that you don't want to change a note.

With *Brideshead Revisited* I did have a sneak preview of Geoffrey Burgon's work during the shooting and I knew from the first notes

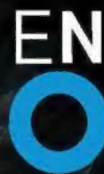


THE MUSIC I COULDN'T LIVE WITHOUT...
Dvořák Symphony No 9, 'From the New World'
 Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra / Rafael Kubelik
 DG © 447 4122GOR

I rediscovered the work amongst my CDs a week ago, popped it in the car and have been really enjoying it.

that it was going to be pretty special and it really has become an iconic piece of music.

Many years ago I went to a production of *Cyrano de Bergerac* at the New York Met with Plácido Domingo. *Cyrano* is probably my favourite story and I have always nurtured a passion to play it. Not only was Plácido unbelievable musically, but he's a breathtakingly good actor. We sat at the end with tears streaming down our faces and the curtain call went on for what seemed like hours. We later passed the restaurant where he was eating and my wife and I looked at each other and said, 'We'll never have another opportunity.' So I crept in and very shyly put my head around the corner and said, 'I'm so sorry to disturb you, but we've been so extraordinarily moved by your performance, I just wanted to say thank you.' And his wife, bless her, leapt from the table screaming, 'Anthony Andrews!' – I was so flabbergasted. It turns out that Plácido and his wife had been fans for years. We became, as a result of that evening, firm chums and my greatest musical experience so far has been to follow like a groupie, as a result of Plácido's wonderful hospitality, his fantastic later career. 🎵
Anthony Andrews performs in My Fair Lady at the Proms on July 14

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